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A

DISSERTATION:

OR,

INQUIRY

Concerning the

Canonical Autority

OF THE

GOSPEL according to MATHEW;

AND THE

REASONS upon which it hath been Antiently rejected by *Heretics:*

OCCASIONED

By a late Pamphlet, intitled, A Third Paſtoral LETTER --- To the People of the two great Cities of *London* and *Weſtminſter*;

Pretending to be a Defence of the Canon of the NEW TESTAMENT.

Nam cum omnibus in rebus temeritas in aſſentiendo, errorque, turpis eſt; tum in eo loco maximè, in quo judicandum eſt, quantum rebus divinis, religionique tribuamus.——Eſt enim periculum, ne aut neglectis iis, impiâ fraude, aut ſuſceptis, anili ſuperſtitione, obligemur.

CIC. *de Divin. l.* 1. *ſub. Init.*

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A

DISSERTATION, &c.

THE limiting, and aſcertaining the Books, of the ſacred *Canon*, of the *New Teſtament* among *Chriſtians*, and the maintaining its Divine Autority againſt *Unbelievers*; hath engaged the pens, and imployed the wits of ſome of the greateſt men, in all ages, from the firſt *Riſe* of *Chriſtianity* it ſelf.

Our *Saviour* and his *Apoſtles* were no ſooner off the Stage, than Forgeries of all kinds, broke in with irreſiſtible force, *Goſpels*, *Epiſtles*, *Acts*, *Revelations*, *Liturgies* without number; publiſhed in the names, and under the feigned Autority of *Jeſus Chriſt*, and his *Apoſtles*, abounded in the *Chriſtian Church*; and as ſome of theſe were as early in time, as any of the writ-

ings in our preſent *Canon*, ſo we find [1], they were received promiſcuouſly with them, and held in equal Credit and Veneration.

In a word, they were made uſe of by the immediate ſucceſſors of the *Apoſtles*, and many of them read in the Public Aſſemblies of *Chriſtians*, as *Canonical Scripture, without the leaſt mark of Diſtinction, in point of Autority*: ſo that the Queſtion hath long been, and ſtill is; whether theſe *Scriptures* (ſome of which are now extant, and in high [2] Eſteem with learned men) have not as good a Right, to be admitted into the *Canon*, as ſome of the Books now there; and the rather, as it does not appear [3], when, or by whom theſe were ſeparately collected, or by what *New Teſtimony* they obtained, the *Diſtinction* they at preſent bear, in the *Catho-*

[1] *Vid. Dodwell*'s Diſſert. on *Irenæus*, I. Sect. 38, 39. *Toland*'s Amyntor, *p.* 20. *Clark*'s Reflect. on Amyn. *p.* 277. Mill. Prolegom. S. 133, *&c.*

[2] *Vid.* A. B. *Wake*'s Preliminary Diſcourſe to his *Engliſh* Tranſl. of Apoſtol. Fathers, *ch.* 10. *Whiſton*'s Prim. Chriſtianity, *&c. Jones*'s Method of ſettling the Canon, *Dodwell, Toland, Mill.* &c.

[3] 'Tis pretended by ſome, that our preſent *Canon* was eſtabliſhed by the *Council*, or rather *Provincial Synod* of *Laodicea* Conven'd about the year 360, conſiſting of 32 Biſhops; tho' 'tis much doubted, whether there ever was any ſuch *Synod* at all, but if there ever was, how could theſe few, at that diſtance of time, and among ſuch a variety of books, determine, which were the true writings of the *Apoſtles*; and what *autority* had this ſlender *Synod* to determine in a matter of ſo great conſequence for the whole *Catholic* church?

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lic Church; the *Autority* of them having been diſputed, from their firſt Publication and appearance in the world; and more eſpecially *the Goſpel*, intitled, *according to Mathew*, which is the ſubject of the enſuing Diſcourſe.

This *Goſpel* (I find) hath been not only diſputed, but abſolutely rejected by great numbers of *Chriſtians*; ſome of whom were of the *Primitive Claſs*, even the *Nazarens*, or firſt converts to *Chriſtianity*, who 'tis believed uſed a different *Goſpel* to it; or one very much interpolated and enlarged; which in oppoſition to Ours, they conſtantly affirmed, to be the only *True Goſpel, of St.* Mathew *the Apoſtle.*

Which Rejection (as is ſaid) of the *Firſt Chriſtians*, hath raiſed great Suſpicion, of the Genuineſs of our preſent *Goſpel*, and cauſed many Inquiries concerning it; and the very little that hath been offered for its ſupport, in a late *Twelve-penny Pamphlet*, intitled, *A Third Paſtoral Letter to the People of the Two Great Cities of* London *and* Weſtminſter; pretending to be wrote by a Perſon, who hath aſpired to great Dignity in the Church, and to contain *a clear Eviction, of the Truth and Autority of all the Sacred Writings of the New Teſtament*, hath very much contributed to that ſuſpicion, and in great meaſure occaſioned the following *Diſſertation* and *Inquiry.*

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In which as the Arguments, and Evidence, of the antient and modern Oppoſers of this *Goſpel*, are freely repreſented, ſo whatever is taken out of the *Fathers*, and Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtorians, in relation to it, is fairly cited; I have dealt equally in that reſpect, as became one, who aims ſincerely at the *Truth*, and therefore ſhall not need, to make Apologies for the Undertaking; it being apparently every man's duty, to do all he can, for the diſcovery of the *Truth*, which muſt neceſſarily advance the intereſt of *True Religion and Virtue*.

Nevertheleſs I am aware, ſome will think it, not very becoming a Private Perſon, to diſturb the world, either with his own, or others doubts, tending to leſſen the *Credit*, of any one Book of the preſent *Canon*, ſo many ages paſt *Eſtabliſhed*, and for the moſt part *Acquieſced* in; and more eſpecially of that very *Book*, which ſtands the *firſt* in order of time, as well as Place, and in the opinion of the moſt, is, as it were, the *Baſis*, and *Outwork* of the whole *Goſpel-hiſtory*.

But as I am not alone in Inquiries of this nature, the ableſt *Divines*, and the greateſt *Friends to Chriſtianity*, having buſied themſelves on the ſame ſubject before me; ſo let ſuch Objectors conſider, that *Truth* always gains ground, and is the more illuſtrated

illuſtrated by ſuch Inquiries, and therefore is to be purſued at all Events; eſpecially, ſuch *Truths* as concern mens Eternal Salvation; and that nothing can be more fooliſh, or preſumptuous, than to confine *The Word of God*, to juſt ſuch a number of Books; or to Lean wholly on *Autority* in ſacred things, how Old or eſtabliſhed ſoever; and farther alſo, that ſhould the *Heretical Arguments* (here purely collected for the ſake of better inſtruction) prevail, even to render *Mathew's Goſpel* ſtill more ſuſpected by ſome than it is; yet *Religion* can be in no danger, *The Will of God* being ſufficiently compriſed, in the other *Canonical Books*, both of the *Old* and *New Teſtament*; or if perhaps all theſe ſhall not be thought ſufficient, yet there are ſtill more *Goſpels* behind, waiting without, praying for admittance into the *ſanctified Number*.

But here 'tis not to be omitted, that there have been ſome *Chriſtians*, who not perfectly ſatisfy'd, with Father [1] *Irenæus*'s Reaſons, that there can be neither more, nor leſs, than *Four Goſpels*; have found fault with, and rais'd ſcruples, even from the ſtated number, of our preſent *Goſpels*, it ſelf; alledging that in the main, they contain little more, than a four-fold re-

[1] Becauſe there be four regions only in the world, with four principal winds, therefore there can be but four goſpels. *Adv. Hæreſ. l.* 3. *c.* 11.

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lation of the ſame facts, of the ſame one *Divine Perſon*, of which they imagine the *Holy Ghoſt*, could never be the Author; for who will ſay, the *Holy Ghoſt*, could ever be the Dictator, of *Superfluity* and *Repetition*; or that if he had inſpired the Writer (ſuppoſe) of any one *Goſpel*, ſuch *Goſpel* alone, ſhould not have been ſufficient to all the purpoſes of *Evangelical Revelation?*

The number of *Goſpels* (ſay they) reflect deficiency on each other; more *Goſpels* than one, inſtead of witneſſing for, imply Defects in thoſe that went before, for the ſupplying of which the latter were neceſſarily publiſh'd; for inſtance, St. *Luke* wrote his *Goſpel* only, becauſe many who had *Undertaken*, *Attempted*, or *Endeavour'd* at, the ſame thing before him; had not *acquitted themſelves faithfully*, or had not been ſufficiently *accurate* therein; this is the ſenſe moſt interpreters put on the firſt words of St. *Luke*'s *Proœmium*, and ſome think he muſt needs have had regard to *Mathew*'s *Goſpel* (among others) which was then extant, and could not but be known to him.——But however that be, 'tis manifeſt in Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory, that the ſole [1] Occaſion of St. *John*'s writing his *Goſpel* in his very old Age, was purely to ſupply the

[1] *Euſeb.* E. H. l. 3. c. 24. *Clem. Alex.* apud eund. lib. 6. c. 14. *Jerom.* Catal. viror. Illuſt. in *Joann. Epiphan.* Hæreſ. 2. Alog. N° 12.

defects,

defects, which himſelf, and the *Aſian Biſhops* had obſerv'd, in all the other three.—— This the *Fathers* generally acknowledge, tho' in ſo doing ('tis apprehended) they immediately ſubvert, the *Divine Autority* of thoſe *Goſpels*; which few in reading thoſe *Fathers* obſerve, not becauſe of the difficulty, but becauſe men dare not ſee, nor look into the *grounds* of their own *Belief*, taken implicitly from their *Teachers*; as is evident in a famous example we have, of a late *Right Rev. Biſhop* of our own *Church*, who when an inferior *Prieſt* would have perſuaded him, to have publiſhed a little book for the correction of ſuch *errors*, and *practices*, as had crept into the *Church*, ſince the firſt ſettlement of *Chriſtianity*; anſwered him with great emotion in theſe words [1]. *Sir, I dare not examine, I dare not examine, for if we ſhould examine, and find that you are in the Right, the Church has then been in an Error, ſo many hundred years.*—— A pretty confeſſion this, of a Paſtor of a reformed Church.

But 'tis thought for all that, the ſaid *Biſhop*'s Caſe (miſerable as it was) is not ſingular —— from the very ſlight defence, the *Paſtoral Letter-writer* has made, for the *Goſpel-hiſtory* in general, and its reputed

[1] Theſe words are atteſted by the Rev. Mr. *Whiſton* under his hand, as ſpoken by Biſhop *Smalridge* to himſelf. *Vid.* Mem. of Dr. *Clark*'s Life, *p.* 177.

Authors in particular: to judge him ſincere, a man muſt conclude he had but a ſuperficial knowledge of the ſubject he undertook, and that if he had dar'd to examine things deeply, and acquainted himſelf more intimately, with the oppoſition ſome Books of the *New Teſtament* have met with, and the arguments of *Heretics* thereupon, he would have choſe, not to have entred into the Diſquiſition at all, rather than have left it, upon ſuch pitiful evidence, as muſt needs increaſe the number of thoſe *Heretics*.

The *Letter-writer*, after having repeated ſome *Heads*, or *Contents* of his two former letters, wherein he pretends [1] *he has laid before us, the evidences of the Chriſtian Religion, as drawn from the accounts, the Evangeliſts give us of our Saviour Chriſt*:—— He proceeds in this his third Letter to ſhew, what in truth is the caſe [2], —*That* Infidelity *can have no other poſſible refuge but in* Infidelity —*or downright diſbelief of the Truth and Autority of the Writings of the New Teſtament*.—*To the End therefore, we may be arm'd in all points, againſt the attempts of* Infidelity *and every approach to it*:—*He hath judged it expedient* (he ſays) *to Enter into that Matter*, i. e. into the proof of the Writings of the New Teſtament, *more fully and diſtinctly, in order to give*

[1] Paſt. Let. *pag.* 3. *Edit.* 1. [2] Ib. *p.* 5.

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us a clear View of the Evidences both of their Truth and Autority. His Poſitions for which, ſo far as they relate to the *four Goſpels*, more particularly, are theſe.

Firſt [1], — *That theſe Goſpels contain, a faithful and true account, of the Birth, Life, Death, Reſurrection, and Aſcenſion of Jeſus Chriſt.* And,

Secondly, *That they have been faithfully tranſmitted to the Chriſtians of ſucceeding Ages.* — Theſe Heads alone are ſufficient; and which, if the *Letter-writer* attends to, and makes good, he will merit the applauſe of all Chriſtendom.

His firſt head is, — *That the four Goſpels contain, a faithful and true account, of the Birth, Life, Death, Reſurrection,* &c. *of Jeſus Chriſt.* — Then follows [2], — *That if we would be ſatisfied of the truth of any Hiſtory, the two things we chiefly inquire after are, the Knowledge the Writer had of his ſubject, and the Character he bore in point of integrity*; — But when the Reader naturally expected, he ſhould have fairly entred into ſome ſuch *Inquiry*, and have proved firſt, who the *Authors* of the *four Goſpels* were, and then have given ſome tolerable account of their *Characters*: — All he ſays to it is [3], — *That the greateſt Enemies of Chriſtianity have never denied, but that there was ſuch a Perſon as Jeſus of Na-*

[1] Paſt. Let. *p.* 9. [2] Ib. *p.* 9. [3] Ib. *p.* 9.

zareth, who lived at the time the Goſpels ſpeak of, and who made choice of ſeveral Perſons, to be his Diſciples (or Apoſtles) *two of which were Evangeliſts* — *Theſe* (he ſays) *left their Callings and Occupations, to attend and receive inſtructions from Jeſus; they both ſaw him, and felt him, were daily converſant with him, and the like.* — *And beſides theſe Natural Qualifications* (he calls them) *they were ſupernaturally aſſiſted alſo to give an account of Chriſt's Life and Actions.*

I do not find, the *Letter-writer* offers at any other Evidence, for theſe hiſtorical facts, than the pretended Negative one, drawn from the *Enemies of Chriſtianity not denying 'em*, except that he has a citation or two out of the Goſpels, to ſhew [1]; *That Chriſt's Apoſtles were all familiar with him, and ſaw all his miracles from the Beginning*; which is falſe of *Mathew*, and does not relate to *Mark* and *Luke*, two other of the *Evangeliſts*.

Now the *Birth, Life, Death, Reſurrection, and Aſcenſion of Jeſus*, as publiſhed by the *Evangeliſts*, including in them a great variety of facts, vaſtly tranſcending all human Powers; *Infidels* had juſt reaſon to expect, the *Letter-writer* ſhould have been more than ordinary particular, in his proofs concerning them; eſpecially, as he undertook to enter into the matter *ſo fully and*

[1] Paſt. Letter, *p.* 10.

diſtinctly,

diſtinctly, as thereby to lay before us a clear view of all their Evidence; whereas having failed abſolutely in ſo doing, and in great meaſure departed too, from his own Poſition; he has given occaſion to *Infidels* to blaſpheme our *Holy Canon* more than ever; and to become more obdurate in their diſbelief of it; *ſo dangerous is it to trifle in our undertakings with ſacred things.*

And then, as to the *antient Enemies of Chriſtianity*, whom the *Letter-writer* in this, and [1] another place, lays great ſtreſs on, as having never denied the *Goſpel-facts*, it may with much better Grace be affirmed, they never believed them; for if they did, why were they any longer *Enemies to Chriſtianity?* The Goſpels teſtify, and the Event of things too plainly proves, that the Divine *Jeſus* lived and died *without Honour in his own country.* What *Pagan Authors* at, or near his own time, wrote of him, cannot now be ſo perfectly known, but may be pretty well gueſſed at, by the primitive Zealots deſtroying all their Writings, and making it their Merit ſo to do.

Notwithſtanding, *Infidels* will be apt to put the *Letter-writer* in Mind, that there is not a ſingle *Goſpel* in our preſent *Canon* but which hath been wrote againſt, and denied, not only by *the Enemies of Chriſtianity*, but by *Chriſtians* too, whoſe Writings

[1] Paſt. Let. *p.* 14.

likewiſe

likewiſe have been all for that Reaſon deſtroyed.

'Tis very certain (I am ſorry to ſay it) there is no mention of any ſuch perſon as *Chriſt* by name, in any one profane Author, whether *Jew* or *Pagan*, at or near *Chriſt*'s own time, as the *Letter-writer*, without any ground is pleaſed to [1] Affirm.

For as to *Tacitus*, *Suetonius* and *Pliny*, cotemporaries under *Trajan*, theſe all living in the ſecond Century, at an immenſe diſtance from *Paleſtine*, could know nothing of the *Goſpel-hiſtory*, but from common Report, and what they ſay either of *Chriſt* or his followers, is ſo little for their Credit, that the *Letter-writer* had much better omitted, all mention of theſe Authors.

So that (I ſay) what we have beſides theſe, either of *Jews* or *Gentiles* relating to *Chriſt*'s Perſon, are either known Forgeries, or they are found only, in the Chriſtian *Prieſts* or *Fathers* who cite them as they pleaſe; and where nevertheleſs we often find, even by the confeſſion of thoſe *Fathers* themſelves, how both *Jews* and *Gentiles* actually denied *Chriſt's divine Birth, Life, Miracles, Reſurrection*, &c. Reproaching alſo *Chriſtians* for their Credulity in that reſpect, and Ridiculing them exceedingly, for *Magnifying his Perſon* in the

[1] Paſt. Let. *p.* 16.

exceſſive

excessive manner they were wont to do.— Not that the *Heathens* themselves knew ought concerning *Him*; no, not that any such person as *Jesus* ever existed, what they said being arguments, *Ad hominem* only, without Entring into the Reality of those facts which *Christians* themselves reported of him.

It is impossible, indeed, in the nature of the thing, would the *Letter-writer* be so ingenuous to own it, that *the Enemies of Christianity*, the *Heathen-world* especially, should know any thing of *Our Saviour* but what must needs have come, from his own followers; so *obscure a Person* as he is on all sides confessed to have been, considering too, the little time he set up for *a Preacher*, and in that time did all he could, to *conceal* himself from *Public notice*, forbiding commonly his *Disciples*, and others to make him known, and wandring for that end himself, up and down in *By-places*, and conversing to the End of his life, with the meanest *sort of People*, scarce ever appearing in the great City of *Jerusalem*, I think, but twice after he became *a Preacher*, viz. at that *Passover* in which he died, and *once* before.

And then as to what is related of him in the *Gospels*, and other Books of the *New Testament*, these 'tis known were wrote so late, and lay afterwards so long conceal'd

conceal'd in the *Archives* of the Churches, and *Desks* of *Private Perſons*, to whom they were particularly directed, *That they came not to light* (ſays the learned [1] *Dodwell) till the Reign of the Emperor* Trajan, *or perhaps that of* Adrian, which, according to the *vulgar Æra*, was near one hundred and thirty years after *Chriſt*, and then they were to be found only, in the hands of *Eccleſiaſtics*, who preſerved them carefully from the *Heathens*, till the third or fourth Century.

Now if the *Letter-writer* is appriſed of all this, as he muſt needs be, and that all the Writings both of *Heathens*, *Jews*, and even of *primitive Chriſtians*, which any way glanced at our *preſent Chriſtianity*, have been actually deſtroyed; can any thing appear more diſingenuous, than to draw arguments for the Verity of the *Goſpel-facts* from their ſilence? Has the *Letter-writer* no way to ſupport the *Goſpel*, but by ſuch mean arts, as muſt neceſſarily ſhock the faith of *Believers*, and expoſe our *Holy Religion* to the inſults of thoſe, who being its cruel enemies know all that is above ſaid to be true? There can be nothing more ridiculous, nor yet dangerous, than to Riſque the Truth of our *ſacred Writings*, upon the ſole negative Evidence of the *Heathens* not refuting them: when

[1] Diſſert. 1. in *Irenæum*. S. 38.

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when we cannot Diſſemble, they came ſo late into their Hands, that all Tradition concerning the Perſon of *Jeſus*, was at an End, even among the *Jews* themſelves, except thoſe of his own Sect, and the *Gentiles*, 'tis certain never had any Perſonal Knowledge at all of him.

But to have done with the *Enemies of Chriſtianity*, let us now ſee what Evidence the *Letter-writer* will draw from its Friends, or what he himſelf will pleaſe to argue farther, in Behalf of Our *Sacred Writings*, and the *Authors* of them; as alſo, what Anſwer *Heretics* and *Infidels* may poſſibly make, or rather have often made, to moſt of his Reaſoning.

And firſt (ſays he) [1] *What we find particularly declared by One* (Apoſtle) *might be truly ſaid by all of them*, viz. [2] "That they "declared only what they had Heard, what "they had Seen with their own Eyes, and "their Hands had Handled":—*The Things They Recorded, as Said and Done by Chriſt* (ſays this Dealer in Letters) *They Heard from his own Mouth, and Saw with their own Eyes, and did not deliver them upon the Report of others*, and more to the ſame Effect. The like of which I believe was never yet, ſo haſtily, and needleſly Aſſerted before *Infidels*; it being certainly True, that the *Evangelical Apoſtles*, have with

[1] Paſt. Let. *p.* 10. [2] 1 *John* i. 1.

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good Reaſon, Related many things of their Maſter, which they neither Heard, nor Saw, directly Said, or Done by Him; and which indeed could not otherwiſe happen, unleſs we ſhall ſuppoſe them, faſtened to his Side, even as Ribs, never to depart from him.

To give an Inſtance or two in the *Goſpel* which is intended the Subject of Our preſent *Inquiry*, and of which we take it for Granted, the *Apoſtle Mathew* was the Author. —— What he Relates there of *Mary*'s *Virginity, of her Delivery, and the Death of Chriſt* —— *Three Myſteries* (ſays [1] Ignatius) *Wrought in the Silence of God, and kept Secret even from the Devil.* —— Theſe ſurely could not proceed from the *Apoſtle*'s own Knowledge. —— The Account the *Apoſtle* likewiſe gives of *Jeſus's Baptiſm, His Temptation in the Wilderneſs, On the Pinnacle of the Temple, and the Mountain, and the Diſcourſe which paſſed in thoſe Places, between Him and the Devil; Of Jeſus's long Sermon on the Mount, The Miracles performed on the Leper and Centurion's Servant, and on the Sea, in laying the Tempeſt, Of his Caſting out Devils of Two Men, and Suffering them to Depart into the Herd of Swine*, with ſeveral other Miracles and Facts immediately following the *ſaid Sermon*, and Compriſed in his Eighth, and part of his

[1] In Epiſt. ad Epheſ. S. 19.

Ninth

Ninth Chapters; all theſe are Recorded evidently from *Hear-ſay*, The *Apoſtle* was preſent to None of them Himſelf, They were all Done before his Call to the Apoſtleſhip, for he was not with *Jeſus from the Beginning* as the *Letter-writer* heedleſly aſſerts, if any Credit is to be given to the *Series* of the *Apoſtle*'s own Hiſtory: — And tho' ſome *Harmoniſts* are ſo Bold, as to Accuſe the Inſpired *Apoſtle*, of ſome Negligence in that reſpect; yet, 'tis hard if they will not allow him to know the preciſe Time, of his own moſt happy Inſtitution to the Office of an *Apoſtle*; beſides, that 'tis expected from the Piety of the *Letter-writer*, that he will not Join with them in a Reproach ſo ſhameful, tho' provoked to't in his own Defence.

And that *Jeſus* inform'd *Mathew* afterwards, of all theſe Particulars with his own Mouth, The *Letter-writer* will not take upon him to make good, either out of *Scripture*, or other *Autority* to be depended on, eſpecially, as the *Humble Jeſus* ſeems plainly to have had no Deſign, either that the *Apoſtles*, or any one elſe, ſhould Record any thing of his Life and Actions. ×

But, beſides thoſe abovementioned, there are ſeveral other Facts, related in *Mathew*, even after his Call to the *Apoſtleſhip*, to which He was in no wiſe Privy; as particularly *Chriſt's Tranſfiguration on the Mount*,

× Jesus Commanded his Disciples to go into all Nations & preach to every Creature & yet the writer gives that Jesus had no design that any one should record his actions. — Superstition

His Arraignment, and the Proceedings thereon before the Chief Prieſts and Pilate, with the ſeveral Facts, attending his *Reſurrection*, all which he muſt Record from the Report of others: Therefore the *Letter-writer* ſeems a little Raſh in making this a Topic of Defence. — That the *Apoſtles* Recorded *Nothing* but what they Saw with their own Eyes, *Nothing* upon the Report of Others, when 'tis ſo evident, to Look no farther, That One half of the *Goſpel* we are Treating of, is Built upon Tradition only.

Thus far concerning One of the *Evangeliſts* only, who was of the Number of the *Twelve Apoſtles*, of whom more fully hereafter. — Of the other, I ſhall Say nothing farther in this Place, Than that all Know, his *Goſpel* was very near his own Time, aſcrib'd to another Perſon, and that the [1] *Proëme* hath been thought by ſome, to be a mere *(Platonic)* Interpolation, or Addition to the *Original Goſpel.*

As to *Mark* and *Luke*, the other Two *Evangeliſts*, and their particular *Goſpels.* — The *Letter-writer* ſays firſt [2], *That it is Affirm'd by Some of the Antients, They were Two of the Seventy Diſciples*, but durſt not Name thoſe *Antients*, becauſe he Knew,

[1] Dubitatum diu multumque fuit, hodieque adhuc a quibuſdam Dubitatur uſque ad Verſ. 6. — Epiſcop. Oper. Theol. *p.* 228. Col. 2.

[2] Paſt. Let. *p.* 11.

he

he had none to name, before the [1] *Third Century*, whoſe Tradition is of no conſequence. — *Papias* Biſhop of *Hierapolis* (the moſt Antient of all the Fathers) ſays of *Mark* expreſly [2], *That he wrote from his own Memory what he had Heard of* Peter, *for he had neither Heard nor followed Chriſt himſelf.* — And St. *Luke* in the *Exordium* of his own *Goſpel* intimates; *That he wrote not what he himſelf was an Eye-witneſs of, but what he Underſtood from Others who were.* — Theſe are ſufficient Teſtimonies, that neither *Mark* nor *Luke* were of the Number of the *Seventy Diſciples*, as the *Letter-writer*, from Evidence he dares not Name, would Inſinuate; as alſo that they were *Traditionary Writers.*

What he Affirms next of theſe *Evangeliſts*, is [3], *That they were both Fellow-labourers* (he calls them) *of St.* Paul *and St.* Peter, which he does upon no other Ground, than for that he finds the Names of One *Mark* and One *Luke* in St. *Paul*'s Epiſtles, and alſo of *Mark* in One of St. *Peter*'s: But theſe Names being ordinary, the Queſtion ſtill remains, Firſt, whether the *Goſpels* were indeed compoſed by Perſons bearing thoſe reſpective Names, which (ſay *Heretics)* the Titles by no Means Aſcer-

[1] Origen. contra Marcion. *p.* 8. Vid. etiam Epiphan. *p.* 428, & 433. but this laſt Father ſpeaks only of *Luke.*

[2] Apud Euſeb. E. H. *lib.* 3. *c.* 39. [3] Paſt. Let. *p.* 11.

tain;

tain; and, Secondly, if ſo, whether they were the *Identical Perſons* mentioned by thoſe *Apoſtles*, about which the *Letter-writer* knows [1] *Divines* differ, and which therefore he ought not to have Concealed from his Inquiſitive Reader.

After this, the Gentleman proceeds to give ſome Account, and to Eſtabliſh the *Canonical Autority* of their Two *Goſpels*, which he Endeavours at by Raking into the *Fathers*, and proving by ſome few Citations from them, not that Thoſe *Goſpels* were compoſed by *immediate Inſpiration*, which it was his Buſineſs to do:—But, Firſt, *That* Mark *wrote down his Goſpel, as it was Preach'd by* Peter; and, Secondly, *That* Luke *compoſed his out of the Sermons of* Paul. Of which Facts, tho' we are at no manner of [2] Certainty; yet the *Letter-*

[1] *Grotius, Cotelerius*, Dr. *Cave, Du Pin, Echard*, &c. Deny this of *Mark the Evangeliſt*, whom they ſuppoſe a different Perſon from him mentioned by St. *Paul.*—— And *Eraſmus, Calvin, and others*, Deny the ſame Thing of *Luke.*

[2] Some ſay, *Mark* Wrote at the Requeſt of the *Romans* in *Greek*, what *Peter* had Preach'd to them at *Rome* in *Latin*, which is abſurd, and that *Peter* ſaw his Goſpel, corrected and approved it.—— Others ſay, *Mark* wrote of his own Memory, what he had Heard *Peter* Preach, but that *Peter* never ſaw it.—— Others, that *Mark* wrote his Goſpel in *Egypt*, which is moſt likely, as he wrote in *Greek*; and that neither *Peter* nor He ever were at *Rome.*—— Whilſt the moſt Judicious, both Antient and Modern, ſay, *Mark*'s Goſpel is but a *Licentious Epitome of Mathew*'s, as indeed it appears to be.

As to *Luke*, He Himſelf tells us, That he wrote what he Received from thoſe, *who from the Beginning, were Eye-Witneſſes of the Word*, which cannot be Underſtood of *Paul.* Anonym.

writer

writer Concludes with the ſame Aſſurance, as if he had given us, the moſt convincing Proofs, of all he contends for. —— *Thus* (ſays he) *Stands the Evidence of the Truth of the Goſpel-Hiſtory, with regard to the exact Knowledge the Writers had of their Subject*; tho' I cannot but Obſerve too, how ſoon he has chang'd his Note. — Juſt now he would have it Believ'd, *Mark* and *Luke* were of the Inſpir'd Diſciples of *Jeſus, Workers of Miracles, and to have wrote of their own Knowledge and Experience*: But now he is Content, if you will but admit 'em to be the *Pediſequi* of *Peter* and *Paul*, and to have Deriv'd their Knowledge from them. He has indeed the Enemy at all Advantage. —— *Mark* and *Luke*, it ſeems, were either *Inſpir'd* themſelves, or They were Taught by thoſe that were, and This is His Way of defending the *Divine Autority* of the *New Teſtament*.

Then, Laſtly, As to the Character and Condition of their Perſons, the *Letter-writer* Speaking generally of all the ſuppoſed Authors of the *New Teſtament*, ſays, [1] —— *They were ſo far from being Artful and Deſigning Men,* — *That they were Reproached by the Enemies of Chriſtianity, for being Rude and Mean, Simple and Illiterate; and ſo far were They from having any Worldly Views, that Perſecution, Af-*

[1] Paſt. Let. *p.* 13.

fliction,

fliction, and Reproach conſtantly attended them.

Now, Firſt, That the Writers of the New Teſtament were *Rude and Mean, Simple and Illiterate*, which the *Letter-writer*, with moſt Divines, Affects to Acknowledge; This, One would think, is ſo far from being part of their Commendation, as 'tis commonly made, that *Infidels*, I am afraid will ſtick to it, that 'tis the greateſt Objection poſſible to their being *Authors*, and therefore, if they were indeed *Rude and Mean, Simple and Illiterate*, the Reproach will be found to be but too well Grounded.

But after all, where is the Neceſſity, of *Divulging* again and again, the *Weakneſſes* and *Incompetencies*, of the firſt *Doctors of Chriſtianity?* Or where the *Piety*, or *Attachment* ſhewn to Our Excellent *Religion*, to be thus continually Aſperſing its *Founders*, —— and fixing to their Perſons the baſe Characters of *Fools and Beggars?* Is not This to Expoſe it deſervedly to the Scorn of *Unbelievers*, —— and to the very ſame Home-Objection, *Chriſtians* uſually make to *Mahometiſm*, viz. *That it had None but an Illiterate Blockhead for its Author?*

Then, Secondly, *That the* Apoſtles *had no Worldly Views*, tho' 'tis a Truth we are all Satisfy'd in, yet it cannot be Inferr'd, as the *Letter-writer* injuriouſly puts it, *from their being conſtantly Perſecuted and Reproach'd,*

proach'd, but the contrary, *Shame and Puniſhment* frequently attending a too eager Purſuit after the *World*, never a Contempt of it. — But neither does the *Letter-writer* know the *Apoſtles were actually Reproach'd and Perſecuted*, after they had left their own Country; and it ſeems to me, an Ugly Reflection upon their *Manners*, and the *Doctrines* they publiſh'd, to ſay they were [1], — For (as St. *Peter* ſays) *If they were Followers of that which was Good, who could Harm them?*

But my Deſign not being to Trace the Gentleman, Step by Step, throughout his looſe Defence, of the *whole Canon of the New Teſtament*, and with which too, This Treatiſe hath no Concern; I ſhall Confine the Inquiry to, and Seek no farther, than the *Firſt Book* of that *Canon*. — And This, to Demonſtrate in a Single Inſtance only, taken from the *Goſpels*, which with the *Letter-writer*, it ſeems, are the leaſt [2] *diſputable* Part of the *New Teſtament*: — That to Eſtabliſh the ſaid *Canon* againſt the Cavils of *Infidels* and *Heretics*, is not a Taſk ſo eaſy as the *Letter-writer*'s Oſtentatious, Careleſs Way of Treating the Subject, bears before it.

But before I Enter upon ſuch *Inquiry*, I cannot but take Notice, that the *Letter-writer* Extracts his Proofs, for the *Inſpiration* of the *New Teſtament*, not from the

[1] 1 *Pet.* iii. 13. [2] Paſt. Let. *p.* 7.

Propriety and Excellency of the Subject Matter of its ſeveral Books, and from the evident *Marks* and *Signs*, they themſelves happily *Afford*, of their own *Divinity*; but moſt an End, out of the *Fathers*.—— Whereas, there is nothing more ridiculous, than to fly for Help to the *Fathers*, and Cite them forſooth, as good Evidence, for *The Word of God* againſt *Infidels*:—For beſides that, *Infidels* will Object to the *Teſtimony* of thoſe *Fathers*, as *Party-Bigots* every Man of them, and, as they Conceive, *Modellers* of that *Religion*, they are brought to Vindicate: So all know that are ever ſo little Acquainted with their Writings, That they are not to be Credited in the Relation, Scarce of any One ſingle matter of Fact, for the many Negligences, Impertinencies, and Falſhoods, that are found in them; Eat up as they were too, with the groſſeſt Superſtitions, and carry'd away with every Notion, which Coincided with thoſe Superſtitions. X

The External, or Written Word of God, can have no other ſure Teſt, than that of its own *Intrinſic Excellency* as it ſtands apparently conform to the *Divine Nature, and to the Nature and Reaſon of Things*, i. e. It muſt neceſſarily Prove itſelf,—— and not be made to ſubſiſt, on the *Credit* of any Set of Men whatſoever:—But leaſt of all on their *Credit*. The Major Part of whom, were they alive, would for their *Hereſies*, their

X very illiberal, no Honeſt man till this enquiries appeard—.

their Knavery, and Inexcuſable Ignorance and Credulity, be the Shame and Blot of their own Profeſſion. — But to Return to my Inquiry.

In purſuance of which I ſhall ſhew with all Freedom (for the Sake of Inveſtigating the Truth) what *Heretics* and *Anti-ſcripturoliſts*, generally Urge againſt the *Autority* of Our *Firſt Goſpel*; which for the Reader's clearer Underſtanding, I ſhall Conſider under the particular Heads following. And,

Firſt, I will ſhew the Great Uncertainty (they think) we are under, as to the *True Author* of this *Goſpel*; Secondly, I ſhall ſhew the *Occaſion* of its being wrote; Thirdly, The *Time* when; Fourthly, I ſhall Inquire in what *Language* this ſame *Goſpel* was wrote; And, Laſtly, I ſhall Treat of its Genuineſs and Autority, and the Grounds upon which *Heretics* have always Rejected it, and Number'd it among Apocryphal Writings. And,

Firſt, That the Apoſtle *Mathew* compoſed a Goſpel for the Uſe of the *Nazarens*, or firſt Converts of his own Country, is on all Hands, as well by *Heretical* as *Orthodox Chriſtians* Admitted [1]; but whether the *Goſpel* we now have, bearing his Name, be the ſame which he wrote, with or without Interpolations, or Retrenchments, is with

[1] Vid. *Sim.* Crit. Hiſt. N. T. Part 1. c. 1. *Sand.* E. H. *p.* 5. Edit. ult.

Heretics, the Great and Difficult Queſtion ſtill remaining to be Solv'd.

It ſeems indeed pretty evident, That the Perſon who Affix'd the Title to this *Goſpel*, whoever he was, intended it ſhould be Underſtood to be, *The Goſpel by* Mathew *the Apoſtle*, i. e. Not as Pen'd by the *Apoſtle*'s own Hand, but by ſome other Perſon, from his Mouth or Teaching. — This, as moſt Think, is the true Import of the *Greek Title* which we follow.

Accordingly thoſe Sects of *Chriſtians*, who condemn this *Goſpel* as Spurious, always deny'd, That the Title was any real Help to the Diſcovery of the *True Author* or *Compoſer*.

The *Greek Titles* to This, and the other *Goſpels* (for they are all the ſame) Run thus, viz. [1] — *The Goſpel according to* Mathew, — *According to* Mark, *&c.* i. e. plainly (ſay the *Heretics)* according to their Teaching or Preaching, and by no Conſtruction that they were themſelves the *Writers*. For then, why ſhould they not be Intitled. — The Goſpel wrote or compoſed *by Mathew the Apoſtle* in the ſame diſtinct Manner as The *Epiſtles* are Intitled, — *The Epiſtle of Paul the Apoſtle to the Romans*, &c. Beſides, as there is but

[1] Theſe Titles were Added, *Ex Solo Teſtimonio Hominum* (ſays Father *Simon)* and therefore will not Prove the Goſpels were Compoſed by thoſe, whoſe Names they Bear, in regard there was an Infinite Number of Forg'd Books, carrying the Names of the Apoſtles. Crit. Hiſt. N. T. Part 1. c. 2.

One

One and the ſame Form to the *Titles* of all the *Four Goſpels*; 'tis Urg'd that they muſt needs have been Affix'd, by ſome foreign Hand [1], as St. *Chryſoſtome* expreſly Aſſures they were, and that, long after the ſaid *Goſpels* were Wrote, and Collected; and therefore *Heretics* inſiſt, 'tis likely the Party who affix'd them, only Gueſs'd at the Matter, or he might ſet the *Titles* purpoſely to deceive, there being nothing more common (ſay they) in the Early Days of *Chriſtianity*, than to ſend *Forgeries* Abroad under the moſt ſpecious *Titles*, which nevertheleſs when they came to be Examin'd, Bewray'd themſelves, having Nothing in them worthy thoſe Holy Perſons, whoſe Names they bore, and as 'tis certain theſe *Titles* were put all at the ſame Time, They could not proceed from the *Authors* themſelves; for as the Holy Authors never [2] us'd to give Titles to their own Works; ſo Theſe are ſuppos'd to have liv'd and wrote, at great Diſtance of Time and Place, from each other, and therefore could not Conſpire, to uſe the ſame Form of Words, had they Inclinations ſo to do, a Form too, as ſome have thought, in its Prime Intention Equivocal, pretending to Indicate the Authors Names, and yet not daring to do it in expreſs Words.

[1] Hom. 1. in Epiſt. ad Roman.

[2] Non eſt Scriptorum Conſuetudo, Ut ante Initium Librorum titulos ponant. *Maldonat.* Com. c. 1. *Math.* Vid. etiam *Crellium* in cap. 1. *Math.*

Where

Where *Mathew the Apoſtle* is mentioned in this *Goſpel*, which (I think) is but [1] twice, He is in both Places mentioned incidentally in the *Third Perſon*, but ſay the Impugners of this *Goſpel*, if the *Evangeliſt* had been the *Apoſtle*, He would have Spoke of himſelf with ſome *Note of Diſtinction*, and in the *Firſt Perſon*, not in the *Third*,—— Except he did it covertly, and with Intention to Conceal himſelf, for which no Reaſon can be aſſign'd; and 'tis very likely (fill'd as the *Apoſtle* was with the Divine Wiſdom, and Writing to the *Jews)* That he would never have appropriated to himſelf, that Term of Reproach neither [2], calling himſelf a *Publican*, contrary to the Natural Policy of all Authors, who have any Deſire their Works ſhould be Credited.

As the *Goſpel* itſelf Affords no Light in this Matter, ſo the Good *Fathers* (whoſe Teſtimony to Oblige the *Letter-writer* we ſhall continue to uſe) Theſe Help very little to Clear it up, all they ſay being Founded on no other [3] Evidence, than their own Credulity. *Irenæus*, who flouriſh'd not till towards the Concluſion of the *Second Cen-*

[1] Ch. ix. 9. x. 3.

[2] The Name as well as Office of a *Publican* was had in the utmoſt Deteſtation among all the *Jews*, ſo that a Book wrote by any under that Character would never be touch'd by them.

[3] See Father *Simon* on this Head, who with the Reſt of his Church, Reſolves all into *Tradition*, without which join'd to the *Autority* of the Church (ſay they) we can have no Aſſurance, That any of the *Evangeliſts* were the Authors of their reſpective *Goſpels*. Crit. Hiſt. c. 2.

tury,

tury, being the firſt Writer, who adventur'd to Cite *Mathew the Apoſtle* as Author of this *Goſpel* by Name.—Indeed there is no other point of Hiſtory (ſays the Adverſary) more in diſpute, than who ſhould be the Author of Our preſent *Goſpel.*

As is Evident further (continues the Adverſary) by the many other different *Titles* and *Names* it bore in the very firſt Age of *Chriſtianity.*—This *Goſpel* now Attributed to *Mathew*, being preſum'd to be the ſame, with that formerly intitled, *According to the Hebrews:* It is the ſame too, Divines Agree, with that which was ſome time Aſcrib'd, *to the Twelve Apoſtles* in general. And at other times to ſome One *Apoſtle* in particular.—As to *Bartholomew*, to *James*, to *Peter*, and laſt of all to *Mathew*; it has at other times been imputed to ſingle *Heretics*, as the Authors of it, ſuch as *Cerinthus*, *Tatian*, &c. And again to whole Sects, ſuch as the *Nazarens*, the *Ebionites*, the *Encratites*, and the like.——All which different Denominations ſufficiently Evince, that the *Antients* were utterly at a Loſs, to whom to Aſcribe this *Goſpel.*—*Adeo Impoſſibile eſt* (ſays a learned [1] Hiſtorian) *de eo certi aliquid definire.*

[1] *Sand.* E. H. *p.* 5. Where alſo the Author learnedly ſhews, That our preſent Goſpel of *Mathew*, is not only different to That Antiently intitled *According to the Hebrews*,——But to that alſo intitled *According to Mathew*, Us'd by the Antients. ——*Aliud Antiquis fuiſſe Evangelium Mathei ab eo, quo hodie Utimur.*

Nevertheleſs,

Nevertheleſs, This great uncertainty, with reſpect to the Author, is no where Urg'd ſingly by the Adverſary, that I know, as a reaſon, why this *Goſpel* ſhou'd be actually excluded the *Canon*, ſince 'tis certain many Books are now there, whoſe *Authors* are as little Known, and conſequently of whoſe *Divine Autority* the Church could never have perfect Aſſurance; becauſe to be Aſſur'd thereof She ought firſt to have evident Proofs, not only of the *Author*, but that He was Influenc'd by the *Holy Spirit*.

For Example, [1] *Holy Church* has been always in doubt, who compos'd the *Epiſtle to the Hebrews*, that of *James*, the *Second of Peter*, the *Second and Third of John*, the *Epiſtle of Jude*, and the *Book of Revelations*; Not to mention the *Goſpel* we are now Treating of, Nor the Scruples ſhe has, with regard to ſeveral Books of the *Old Teſtament*, which however ſhe thinks fit to retain, in her Catalogue of the *Sacred Writings*; making therefore an evident *diſtinction*, between Books properly only [2] *Canonical*, and properly *Divine*.

As the *Author of Mathew's Goſpel* is thought very uncertain, the *Occaſion* of its

[1] Euſeb. E. H. lib. 3. c. 3 & 25.

[2] The Diſtinction of Sacred Books into *Canonical*, and *Apocryphal*, was firſt Invented by *Heretics*, to which the *Church* after ſome time was oblig'd to Yeild. ——Each Party Eſpouſing thoſe Scriptures as *Canonical*, in which their peculiar Tenets were to be found, the reſt they Term'd *Apocryphal*, or *Deutro-Canonical*, ſuffering them to be Read not only at *Home*, but in *Public Aſſemblies*.

being

being Wrote is no leſs ſo; which is my *ſecond Head of Inquiry.* All we can gather (ſay its Adverſaries) from among Hiſtorians concerning This, is from *Euſebius*, who, they think, gives but a ſcurvy Account of this matter; for as 'tis very remarkable, that Our *Saviour* wrote Nothing himſelf, nor left any Directions for Writing to his *Diſciples*, No, not after his *Reſurrection*; ſo according to [1] *Euſebius*, *Neither the Twelve Apoſtles, nor* Seventy Diſciples, *were much Inclin'd to Write Books*; He ſays *Mathew and John only, have left us any written Memoirs* (or Hiſtorical Goſpels) *and further, that even theſe Two, were compell'd to Write what they did*, (by their Auditors, he means) *Mathew in particular by the Hebrews, when he was upon the Point, of Setting out on his Travels, to Preach the Goſpel to the Gentiles.*

By which This *Father* would unhappily inſinuate, That neither *Mathew*, nor *John* Wrote of their own Inclination, or Free Motion of the *Holy Ghoſt*; but that they were Oblig'd thereto by their own *Diſciples* againſt their Will; which hath given Occaſion to *Libertines*, to ſay, Theſe *Diſciples* had the Propagation of *Chriſtianity* more at Heart, and conſequently had more of the *Holy Ghoſt* in them, than their Teachers.

[1] E. H. lib. 3. c. 24.

The *Time* when This *Goſpel* was wrote too, which is the next *Head of Inquiry*, is a Point, of as great Difficulty to be ſettled, as any other: *Heretics* ſay, We can bring but One of all the *Antients*, who hath Aſſign'd any *Time* at all for it, and that is *Irenæus*, who, by the way, is not very Explicit; all he ſays to it is [1], *That Mathew Publiſh'd his Goſpel when Peter and Paul were at Rome*, which the moſt accurate *Chronologers* Place in the Year [2] 64, at ſooneſt. — For then (ſay they) The Perſecution under *Nero* began at *Rome*, ſome time in which Thoſe *Two Apoſtles* are ſuppos'd to have ſuffer'd together: — But ſome thinking This Account of *Irenæus*, ſomewhat of the lateſt; pretend to collect from *Euſebius*'s Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory, That *Mathew* Wrote in the Year 41. But *Euſebius* ſays no more, *Than* [3] *that Mathew having firſt Preach'd to the Hebrews, and being about to Go and Preach to the Gentiles, wrote his Goſpel*, &c. — Nevertheleſs, They who would oppoſe *Euſebius* to *Irenæus*, Conjecture, That this ſame Going, or Departure of *Mathew* from *Jeruſalem*, muſt needs have happen'd in the Year 41, Or Eight

[1] *Iren.* adv. Hæreſ. lib. 3. c. 1.

[2] Vid. *Du Pin* E. H. Vol. I. c. 5. Who is particular to this Point. —— *Platina* ſays, *Peter* and *Paul* ſuffer'd, *Anno Dom.* 70, or thirty ſeven Years after the Crucifixion, the ſame Year in which *Jeruſalem* was taken and demoliſh'd. *Eachard* ſays, this Perſecution began in 65. *Rom. Hiſt.* Nero's *Reign.*

[3] *Euſeb.* E. H. lib. 3. c. 24. Vid. Mill. Prolegom. *p.* 7. N°. 61.

Years

Years after the *Aſcenſion*; Their only Ground for which is, That it was the ſame Year, in which the *Apoſtles* were *Illuminated*, and made to know, That the *Goſpel* was to be Preach'd to the *Gentiles*, but I am aſham'd to lay any Streſs upon a Conjecture ſo very precarious.

Let Us ſuppoſe for Argument Sake, That *Euſebius* hath Aſſign'd a *Time for the Writing this Goſpel*, but different to That of *Irenæus*; yet how ſhould we help Cloſing with *Irenæus* (though a Simple Man) and contend, that he muſt needs have been better Acquainted with this Matter of Fact, than *Euſebius*, who liv'd near *Two Hundred* Years after him, and *Three Hundred* after the Fact in Controverſy: Beſides, that 'tis an unanſwerable Objection, to any Autority of *Euſebius*, That he could have no Intelligence of this Matter, but from *Irenæus* only; No other Eccleſiaſtical Writer, that we Know of, having fix'd any *Time*, for the Writing this *Goſpel*.——I may add too, That all the *Roman Catholic* Divines, are for the Account given by *Irenæus*; but ſome Proteſtants have Scrupled of mere Superſtition, — "As "Imagining it inconſiſtent with Divine "Providence to permit, that the Churches "for ſo long a ſpace of Time, as this "of Thirty Years or more, ſhould be "left deſtitute of an Authentic Hiſtory,

" of the Miracles, and Doctrines of Chriſt:
" And, foraſmuch as God always Acts (ſay
" they) by Natural Means, ſo they con-
" ceive, no Memory ſufficient, to retain
" ſuch a Number of *Facts*, *Sermons*, *Doc-*
" *trines*, *Promiſes*, *Prophecies*, and curſory
" *Sayings of Chriſt*, ſo long a Time, with-
" out great Omiſſion; neither dare they
" preſume, upon ſo long a Neglect of the
" *Apoſtles*, and Governours of the Church,
" to commit the *Hiſtory of Jeſus* to Writ-
" ing, which at the ſame Time is to ſup-
" poſe them, very defective in their Zeal
" for *Chriſtianity*, or elſe Ignorant of the
" moſt likely means to promote it."

But what are Theſe mere *Arguments of Convenience* only to a ſtubborn Matter of Fact, and which (ſay the *Roman Divines*) *Proteſtants* do not See, bear with ſtronger *Emphaſis* againſt the Conduct of *Jeſus Chriſt* himſelf, than of his *Apoſtles*, who (as is ſaid) left them no Directions to Write, and what is moſt admirable, wrote nothing himſelf; tho' he muſt needs foreſee (ſay *Libertines*) That ſuch Omiſſion would be attended with bad Conſequences; for they preſume a *Goſpel* compoſed by the Divine *Jeſus*, muſt have anticipated all Sects, and conſequently all Hatred and Perſecution among *Chriſtians*, which hath reduc'd them to ſuch narrow Bounds in the World; and *Pagans* then ſhould have

have had no Occaſion to ſay [1], —*We will not Believe Jeſus's Goſpel, becauſe it was not wrote by Jeſus himſelf.* But to the point.—

Euſebius having (as is ſaid) no other Father or Hiſtorian from whom he could take his Account of *Mathew*'s Time of Writing, but from *Irenæus* only; there is no Queſtion (had he Aſſign'd any Time) but that he would have concurr'd with him: For it appears he was very converſant with *Irenæus*'s Writings, and often Copy'd his Words from him, as particularly, he does this Account of *Mathew*'s Time of Writing in his [2] *Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory*, and which 'tis likely he acquieſc'd in; for elſe why did he not Cenſure it there, or Contradict it rather, in his *Chronicon*, where he is wholly Silent.

It Appears then, according to Father *Irenæus* (a Witneſs after the *Letter-writer*'s own Heart) That St. *Mathew's Goſpel*, the Firſt of the Four, was not Wrote till at leaſt *Sixty Four*, or *Sixty Five Years* after Our Saviour's *Nativity*, and above *Thirty Years* after his *Crucifixion*; notwithſtanding, the *Letter-writer* expreſly maintains [3], *That not only This, but all the other Goſpels were Wrote and Publiſh'd too, while the Matters were freſh in Memory, and while many Perſons were Living, who wanted not*

[1] *Nolunt Evangelio, Credere, Quia non ab ipſo Jeſu illa conſcripta ſunt. Aug. Retract.* lib. 2. c. 16.

[2] Lib. 5. c. 8. [3] Paſt. Let. *p.* 14.

Inclination,

Inclination, to detect the Evangeliſts, if they could have been convicted of Falſhood; and tho' he knows too, That One of the Goſpels (even that according to *John)* was not compos'd, till near *Seventy Years* after *Our Saviour's Deceaſe*, and an *Hundred Years* after his *Nativity*; and further alſo, that the Sacred Writings of the *New Teſtament* could not be [1] obtained by the Heathens, but thro' Force and Stealth, for above *Two Hundred Years* longer.

But I come now, Fourthly, to *Inquire in what Language This ſame Goſpel, Intitled, According to* Mathew, *was originally compil'd.*

To this, *Papias* (the Antient Biſhop of *Hierapolis)* ſays [2], *That* Mathew *Wrote his Goſpel in Hebrew*, —— And [3] *Irenæus* after him, *That* Mathew *delivered to the* Hebrews *the Hiſtory of the Goſpel, Wrote in their own Language*, ſo [4] *Origen*, ſo [5] *Euſebius*, ſo alſo [6] *Jerom*; and ſo in general, all the *Fathers* to a Man, all agreeing to the ſame Tradition.

[1] Thoſe *Chriſtians* who delivered up their Goſpels to the *Heathens*, tho' they did it under the utmoſt Threats of Torments and Death; yet, were thereafter Branded with the Infamous Name of *Traditores*, i. e. Givers up, or Betrayers of the Myſteries, and for which they did ſevere *Penance*, and were made incapable of the *Prieſthood*.

[2] Apud *Euſeb.* E. H. l. 3. c. 39.

[3] Adv. *Hæreſ.* l. 3. c. 1.

[4] Apud *Euſeb.* E. H. l. 6. c. 25.

[5] Ib. l. 3. c. 24.

[6] Jerom. Proœm. in Com. Math.

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Notwithſtanding which, ſome *Modern Critics* of great Autority, Namely, *Eraſmus*, *Cardinal Cajetan*, *OEcolampadius*, *Flaccius Illyricus*, *Calvin*, *Voſſius*, &c. among Foreigners; and Dr. *Lightfoot*, Dr. *Whitby*, the Reverend Mr. *Jones*, and others of Our own Nation, (not regarding the *Fathers)* have Oppos'd the aforementioned *Tradition*, Endeavouring to prove on the Foot of *Critics* and learned Obſervations, That the *Goſpel* we now have *according to Mathew*, was certainly deriv'd from ſome *Greek Original*, there being nothing more eaſy (ſay they) than to Diſtinguiſh always, between a *Tranſcript*, and a *Tranſlation*:—And then as to the *Hebrew Text* of this *Goſpel*, found in the Fifth Century, by St. *Jerom*, in Cuſtody of the *Nazaren-Chriſtians* of *Berea* and *Cæſarea*, Cities in *Paleſtine*; and which were then ſuppoſed to be *Copies of Mathew's Original:* Theſe (they imagine) not to have been *Copies*, but an *Early Tranſlation* from the *Original Greek*, made by the *Apoſtles* for the Uſe of the *Nazarens*; The *Holy Ghoſt* deſcending on them for that Purpoſe; and as to the *Greek Text* now Extant, This they ſuppoſe to be a True *Copy* of that *Original*, wrote by St. *Mathew*'s own Hand, preſerv'd by an extraordinary Providence; which Notion of theſe Great Men, as it hath no Foundation in Hiſtory, ſo hath it the worſt Tendency imaginable, as will

Appear

appear hereafter, and is vaſtly abſurd in this reſpect, as it ſuppoſes the *Rude* and *Illiterate Mathew* to have wrote to his Countrymen the *Jews*, in a *learned polite Language*, which neither *They*, nor 'tis likely *Himſelf* [1] underſtood; and This too, when he Wrote at their Requeſt, and for their more particular Uſe; and that when he had ſo done, They were neceſſitated to get his *Goſpel* Tranſlated by the other *Apoſtles*, (Heav'n Interpoſing) before they could make any Uſe of it.

Mathew the Apoſtle, is generally agreed to have been a *Jew*, and that he compos'd his *Goſpel*, for the Sake of the *Jews*; now can it be conceiv'd, ſuppoſing him properly qualified, that he ſhould on this Occaſion, compliment Foreigners, more than his own Countrymen, and ſhew all his Regard for their Churches, and none for thoſe of his own Nation; a Partiality certainly a *Jew*, could never be Guilty of?

[1] It has been the Opinion of Great Divines, the Apoſtles did not Learn *Greek* by Inſpiration; *Peter* had his Interpreter, and ſo had *Paul*. —— Nay, *Paul* fairly ownes himſelf ignorant in the *Greek*, 2 *Cor.* xi. 6. which it ſeems, tho' Born in a *Grecian City*, by his long Stay in *Judea*, he had in great Meaſure forgot.

Dum Excuſo Apoſtolos (ſays Eraſmus) *Qui Græcitatem ſuam, non ex Orationibus Demoſthenis, ſed ex Vulgi colloquio Didicerint; non nego Donum Linguarum, neque tamen inde Sequitur, eos non potuiſſe Græcè diſcere ex Vulgi colloquio.* —— Then follows, —— *Quod ſi contendis hanc Græcitatem quam Videmus in Apoſtolicis Literis, eſſe Donum Cæleſte.—Unde tanta Sermonis Ruditas, imò Barbaries, quam Diſſimulare non poſſumus?* Epiſt. ad Eckium.

Nor

St Paul does not say he is ignorant of the Greek — Mr Inquirer

Nor will any One believe, the *Holy Ghoſt* Inſpir'd *Mathew* on this Occaſion, purpoſely to Write in *Greek*, contrary to his apparent Duty and End of Writing; or, if you will ſay, the Gift of Tongues was Conſtant and Uniform, is not writing or Preaching to a People in a *Strange Language*, a ſore *Abuſe* of that Gift, Inverting the End for which it was beſtow'd?

But *Greek*, ſay theſe *Proteſtant Divines*, was the more *Univerſal Language*; which Implies again, that *Mathew* did not Write, at the Requeſt, and for the more peculiar Uſe of the *Jews* at *Jeruſalem*; for if ſo, He was not to regard the *Univerſality of a Language*, but he was to Write in that *Language* only, which the People, at whoſe Inſtance, and for whoſe Inſtruction He immediately Wrote, Underſtood; Common Decency ſhould have taught *Mathew* this, tho' not Inſpir'd, and how *Rude* and *Illiterate* ſoever: The *Jews* certainly ſhould have their own Goſpel in their own *Language*, the *Language* in which it had been Preach'd, by this ſame *Apoſtle* to them, and let the *Greeks* afterwards Tranſlate it, if they thought fit, and had not patience to Stay, for thoſe other *Goſpels* which the *Holy Apoſtle* foreſaw, and might declare would ſhortly be compos'd for them in their own Dialect.

Indeed, *Proteſtant Divines*, after all their *Critics*, are ſo Ingenuous, as to let you

know, why they Labour this Point ſo heartily; not that any One Fact ariſes in Hiſtory, to Determine them in That, of which they would ſeem perſuaded; but for that They are apprehenſive, if the Thing was ſo, I mean, if this *Goſpel* was Originally compiled in *Hebrew*, that then its Autority would be more dubious; the *Original Text* being loſt, and even the *Copies* of that *Original* which (they Think too) *Providence* would never ſuffer.

But why did it ſuffer it to be corrupted, as moſt agree it was, and that as ſoon almoſt, as it came into the *Nazaren*'s Iſlands? And if That be the Caſe, 'tis ſcarce worth the diſputing now, in what *Language* it was Wrote; Again, Suppoſe it compos'd in *Greek*, yet will it not thence follow, Our preſent *Greek-Text* is more pure, Since it is not known, nor was ſo long ſince as [1] St. *Jerom*'s time, from whence That ſprung.

If the *Original* was Wrote in *Greek*, and deliver'd to the *Nazarens*, 'tis not likely, they would Part with it to the *Gentiles* (their Avow'd Enemies) to make Copies by; 'tis infinitely more probable, that having caus'd it to be Tranſlated into *Hebrew* with Amendments for their own general Uſe,

[1] *Matheus primus in* Judæa, *propter eos, qui ex Circumciſione Crediderunt, Evangelium Chriſti Hebraicis Literis Verbiſque compoſuit; quod quis poſtea in Græcum tranſtulerit, non ſatis certum eſt. Hieron. de Script. Eccl. in Math.*

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ſome Copies of that *Hebrew Tranſlation* in proceſs of Time, unavoidably ſtole abroad, and fell into the Hands of the *Gentile Chriſtians*; who reduc'd it again, into the *Greek* we now have; as we are intirely in the Dark in this Affair; this Conjecture ſeem much more Rational, than to Imagine with all thoſe, who pretend Our preſent Copies are deriv'd from a *Greek Original*, that the *Jewiſh Chriſtians* were in Haſt, to Tranſmit Authentic Copies to the *Gentiles*, of their own Original in its firſt Purity, even before They had ſerv'd themſelves with it.

Upon the whole, notwithſtanding all has been ſaid, on this Head, by *Modern Divines*; moſt think that Our preſent *Goſpel*, is on a much better Foot of *Credit*, ſuppoſing it deriv'd from a *Hebrew Original*, than if we ſhould allow it compoſed in *Greek*; becauſe in the latter caſe, we ſhall be forc'd to confeſs it, a different *Goſpel* to that, which St. *Mathew* certainly compoſed, even a Counterfeit, Palm'd on Us in its ſtead; for be Our *Greek Text* from whence it will, that the *Apoſtle* wrote in *Hebrew* to the *Jews*, who ſpake *Hebrew*, was a Fact ſo Notorious to the *Antients*, ſo well Atteſted, ſo Univerſally Aſſented to, and ſo Natural to be True, that there is no withſtanding it; the Tradition is Trac'd up, very near to the Time of the *Holy Apoſtle* himſelf, and downward again

for above Fifteen Hundred Years together, without Interruption; therefore, after ſuch a continued Train of Evidence, for ſome *Moderns*, (of whom I think *Eraſmus* was the firſt) to come now and ſay, and ſtick to it, upon the Foot of *Critics* only, that the *Original* of Our preſent *Goſpel*, was certainly *Greek*; what is it but in other Words to Affirm, it is not the ſame with St. *Mathew*'s (as the *Heretics* always aſſerted) and conſequently that a Spurious *Goſpel* hath been impoſed on us?

I come now to my *Fifth and laſt Head*, which is to conſider more nearly, *the Genuineſs and Autority of* Mathew's *Goſpel, and the Grounds upon which it was antiently, and is now, rejected by ſome Heretics.*

In Treating of which, I ſhall be Oblig'd to repeat ſome things already ſaid, in regard, This Head bears ſo near a Relation, to thoſe that went before.

Now to be ſatisfy'd of the Truth of any Hiſtory, the Impugners of this *Goſpel*, and the *Letter-writer* are well agreed; that it is requiſite we ſhould know, Firſt, *Somewhat of the Author's Character*; Secondly, *Whether the ſame* (if Antient) *hath been faithfully Tranſmitted down to Us*; And, Laſtly, Its *Autority* will depend in great meaſure too, *Upon its own Intrinſic Evidence*, with regard to the Reaſonableneſs and Credibility of Facts therein related.—We have ſeen,

First, On what a precarious Foot (in the Opinion of thoſe who oppoſe this Goſpel) the ſame ſtands with reſpect to its *Author*, whoſe very Name is not certainly known, ſo many *Authors* (ſay they) was this *Goſpel* from the Beginning aſcribed to, So many *Titles* it bore, and ſo *Queſtionable* is its preſent Title, that we can by no *Criterion*, arrive to any Certainty, who the Writer was; Nay, was its Title never ſo expreſs, ſo many Forgeries were Obtruded upon the World, in the *Apoſtles* Names, That this neither would not be ſatisfactory, in a Matter of ſo great Importance, without ſome further Evidence corroborating it.

But Hiſtory they tell you Affords none of that kind, till at leaſt One *hundred Years*, after the pretended *Publication* of Our preſent *Goſpel*; Father *Irenæus* (as Obſerved) being the firſt Eccleſiaſtical Writer of all thoſe whoſe Works are now extant, that cites *Mathew the Apoſtle* by Name as the Author of it.

Now (ſay *Heretics*) the little Account we ought to make of his Teſtimony, in this Particular, appears hence, That 'tis founded upon the Tradition, he received from *Papias*, whoſe Scholar he was,——*A Man* (ſays [1] *Euſebius*) *of Weak Judgment, A fabulous Author, and One who led many into Error, and particularly his Pupil* Irenæus; ſo that upon this Fool and Knave both

[1] E. H. l. 3. c. 39.

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(accorditg to *Euſebius)* doth the whole Tradition, of *Mathew*'s being the Author of the *Goſpel* we now make Uſe of, depend.

For as *Irenæus* had it from Old *Papias*, ſo *Euſebius* plainly took it from them both, Notwithſtanding his bad Opinion of the Men; and to theſe all the following *Church Writers* venture to ſubſcribe, without any Diſquiſition, as appears, into the Fact; and this is the goodly Evidence (ſay the *Heretics)* which we *Orthodox Believers*, have been all along taught to Confide in; and which having been ſo often objected to Us, in Triumph by the Adverſary, 'Tis much to be wondred, the *Letter-writer* ſhould paſs it over, without Offering to furniſh the World, with ſome more Material Evidence in its ſtead, Eſpecially in an Affair of the higheſt Concern,—— As whether the Books of the *New Teſtament*, One or other of them, were wrote by thoſe, They are pretended to be wrote, and conſequently by Divine Inſpiration.

Indeed the preſent *Goſpel* (ſay the ſame Perſons) ſhould for Diſtinction ſake, be term'd, *The Goſpel by Mathew According to the Gentiles*; for there was another *Goſpel* (ſay they) extant in the *Primitive Church*, which all the firſt Converts made Uſe of, and aſcribed to *Mathew*'s Writing, And which therefore was commonly called, by way of Diſtinction —— *The Goſpel by Mathew*

Matthew According to the Hebrews; "This "*Goſpel* (ſaid the *Hebrews)* is the ſame, "which You *Gentiles* acknowledge, the "*Apoſtle* wrote for Our Uſe, and at Our "Requeſt, and deliver'd to us the Ori-"ginal, the ſame which we kept ſacred "among our Selves for near five hundred "Years together, When You *Gentiles* de-"ſtroyed, both Copies and Tranſlations, "to take off all Rivalſhip, as it ſhould "ſeem, between the two *Goſpels*, And "that Yours alone might Reign with-"out Competition".

This (Say Our Oppoſers) is what the *Jewiſh Chriſtians* always urged; and we ſee with what Juſtice, They gave the Precedence to their own *Goſpel*. — "Ours (ſaid "they) was the Original, We had the keep-"ing of it all along, We claim it by your "own Confeſſion," *The Verity of an Act always precedes the Corruption of the ſame.*

To Obviate this *Jewiſh* Objection, ſome [1] *Moderns* have feigned, That the *Apoſtle Mathew* did indeed publiſh Two Editions of his *Goſpel*, The firſt in *Hebrew* for the *Jews*, but the laſt and moſt correct in *Greek* for Us *Gentiles*——This indeed is an Anſwer, But (ſays the Adverſary) 'tis at the Expence of all Sincerity and good Reading, there being no Foundation for it,

[1] Sixt. Senenſ. Bibl. Sacr. lib. 7. *p.* 385. *Whitby*'s Preface to the four Goſpels. *Nye*'s Defence of the Sacred Canon againſt *Toland*, *p.* 78.

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either in Hiſtory or Oral Tradition; 'Tis an Expedient the Fathers, rich in Inventions, never hit on; for they ſubmitted always the whole Autority of this *Goſpel*, to *Papias* and *Irenæus*; And Choſe to ſay the Gentile-Copy of *Mathew*, was the only *True One*, the ſame with that of the *Hebrew-Chriſtians*, before the latter was Interpolated and Corrupted.

Tho' Others again have been of Opinion, The *Nazaren Goſpel* was abſolutely diſtinct from it, Or St. *Jerom* never would have Tranſlated it into *Greek* and *Latin*.

But this breaks in upon what I would Conſider next, which is, *How faithfully the Goſpel compiled by Saint Mathew hath been Tranſmitted down to Us.*

In Relation to which, its *Enemies* will be apt to obſerve, That if what the *Antients* unanimouſly affirm, *viz.* That the *Apoſtle Mathew* compoſed his *Goſpel* in *Hebrew*, is to be depended on; Then the *Goſpel* we now make Uſe of, according to ſome *Moderns* of great Name, cannot be the ſame, but Another whoſe Original, it ſeems, was *Greek*; They will tell us, we have loſt *Mathew's Hebrew Goſpel*, and a *Greek* One is Tranſmitted to us in its ſtead, of whoſe *Autority* we know nothing.

But again, ſhould it be ſuppoſed, Thoſe *Moderns* are miſtaken, and that the *Goſpel* we now have, is the ſame with that mentioned by the *Fathers* (the Original of which was

was *Hebrew*) yet, the ſame *Fathers* tell You, the *Nazarens* began to Stuff it very ſoon with their own *Inventions*; and that the *Ebionite Goſpel* too (another Branch of it) was ſtill more *corrupt*:—Notwithſtanding which, and that he knows the *Heretics* inſiſt, That this is the Voice of all Antiquity, yet the *Letter-writer* contents himſelf with barely Aſſerting, [1] *That this* (among the other *Goſpels*) *hath been faithfully Tranſmitted to Chriſtians of ſucceeding Ages*; Offering no Proof,—But putting it upon *Infidels* rather to Prove it for him, and to ſhew, *That any other Book whatſoever, has ſuch, and ſo many plain, and ſtrong Teſtimonies of a faithful Tranſmiſſion, as the New Teſtament.*—And in order to induce them thereto (and I dare ſay, with no Deſign to Inſnare them) he Aſſures them the Coaſts are all clear [2].—*Chriſtianity* (ſays he) *Requires no farther Favour, than a fair and Impartial Inquiry into the Grounds and Doctrines of it:*—But *Infidels* and *Heretics* both having tried the Spirit of (ſome people's) Chriſtianity, and Smarted ſo often, for Truſting to Invitations of this ſort, care not, I ſee (after long Expectation) to venture.—I ſhall only take upon me to ſay (who always held the *Books of the New Teſtament* in the utmoſt *Veneration* till the laſt *Paſtoral Letter* flung Doubts in my way) That *the Faithful Tranſmiſſion* which the *Letter-writer* contends for (if we reſpect

[1] Paſt. Let. *p.* 63. [2] Firſt Paſt. Let. *p.* 54.

Mathew's Goſpel only) can never be made fairly to appear, from Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory only, it being impoſſible in the Nature of the Thing, admitting, as that does, the *Original* of it to have been *corrupted*, which is the Caſe of no one profane Author, that I know of; or if you will aſſert, the *Hebrew Original* remain'd intire, till ſuch time, as a Tranſcript, or elſe Our preſent Verſion was made from it; yet how ſhall that appear? No one *Gentile Father* having ever ſeen, or pretended to have ſeen, which is much, *Mathew's Original*; and therefore it was impracticable to compare and rectify either Tranſcript or Verſion by it, or be aſſur'd whether it was true or falſe; ſo that I am afraid *Heretics* will inſiſt, That this is *Argumentum ad Ignorantiam* only, or a mere Aſſertion rather, without either Proof or Probability.

If old *Papias* is good for any thing, he may ſerve to refell all pretence to a Fact, in which he could not well be miſtaken.— He liv'd after the Commencement of the *ſecond Age*, long after *Mathew's Goſpel* is ſuppos'd to have been publiſh'd; and what he ſays to it is, [1] *That Mathew having wrote his Goſpel in Hebrew, every one Interpreted it, as he was able.*— Upon which Words a late [2] Learned and Worthy Divine of our own Church, naturally obſerves, — *That*

[1] Apud Euſeb. E. H. lib. 3. c. 39.
[2] *Whitby*'s Preface to the four Goſpels.

Papias

Papias knew nothing of any Authentic Verſion of Mathew's *Goſpel, approv'd by the Apoſtles, and look'd upon in his Time, as Canonical by the Church*; but if the *Gentile Church* had obtain'd no One *approv'd Verſion* ſo late, i. e. Not till after the Beginning of the ſecond Century (before which time 'tis univerſally allow'd the *Nazarens* had corrupted their *Original*) *Heretics* will aſk from whoſe Hands, or by what Means or Teſtimony, ſhe could procure it afterwards, except only by a New Revelation?

The Truth is, — The *Original Hebrew* being a *Sacred Depoſitum* in the Hands of the *Nazarens*; the *Gentiles* muſt have been content, with ſuch a Copy or Verſion, as thoſe People thought fit to allow them; and if they were ſo very Intent (as moſt agree) upon *Corrupting*, with their own *Additions*, even the *Original* itſelf; is it likely, They would oblige the *Gentile Chriſtians* (their bitter Enemies) with a truer Copy than they had themſelves? Or with a Verſion more pure than their own Original? Few *Heretics* will believe this.

That theſe *Two Goſpels*, viz. *That* we have at preſent, and the *Nazaren* did indeed differ very materially from each other, is a Fact that appears even at this Day; ſince many of the *Various Readings* in the *Nazaren-Goſpel* (or Interpolations, if you had rather call them) are now extant, having been collected out of the *Fathers* with

great Pains by ſeveral *learned* [1] *Hands.*— Tho' theſe do not at all help us out in our preſent Inquiry, for the Queſtion ſtill remains, whether Theſe are indeed *Interpolations*, or rather part of the *Original Goſpel?* Or whether thoſe firſt Converts, and Cotemporaries with the *Apoſtles*, if they did add or interpolate, had not good Reaſon and Autority for ſo doing? [2] As many learned Men ſuppoſe they had. And if ſo, then (ſays the Adverſary) it will follow, ſuppoſing both *Goſpels* had the ſame *Original*, that our preſent *Copies* are Retrench'd, or not ſo faithfully Tranſmitted as they ought to have been.

After all, 'tis a melancholy Thing, Eccleſiaſtical Writers ſhould agree, The *Original* itſelf of *Mathew*'s *Goſpel* was at any time *corrupted*; ſince if the Thing were ſo, the ſame will amount even to a Demonſtration, That the firſt Converts (the Corrupters) never Believ'd it of *Divine Inſpiration*; but knew it rather, to have been compil'd, by One among themſelves, not only liable to Miſtake, but who had actually Miſtaken, in thoſe Facts or Points to which they ſo readily, and without Scruple made Alterations; for what elſe could determine thoſe *Chriſtians*, to Alter and Adulterate a *Goſpel*, which was wrote to oblige themſelves, by an inſpired *Apoſtle* too, and a Friend of their own chooſing? There-

[1] Vid. Fabritii Cod. Apocryph. N. T. &c. *p.* 356—371.
[2] Vid. Sim. Crit. Hiſt. N. T. Part I. c. 7.

Therefore that They corrupted it at all ſeems to me (I confeſs) a mere Slander of the *Gentile Fathers*, without Foundation, in order to magnify their own Goſpel; in regard great *Encomiums* are given the *Nazaren Goſpel*, as well by thoſe who have thought it a *diſtinct Original*, as by thoſe who have conceiv'd it of the *ſame Origin* with Our preſent *Goſpel*.

" The Firſt believe it was an honeſt " Compoſure, not by a ſingle Hand, but " by a Council, or Collection of *Jewiſh* " Converts at *Jeruſalem*, ſoon after Our " *Saviour's Aſcenſion*, and ſome time before " St. *Mathew*'s, or any other of our pre- " ſent Canonical Goſpels appeared, and " therefore to be prefer'd to them; and " that the moſt antient *Fathers* receiv'd it " among other the Inſpir'd Writings.

" The Latter ſay boldly, That our pre- " ſent *Greek Text* is of no Validity, but to " be eſteem'd rather Apocryphal, in reſpect " to the *Old Hebrew* of the *Nazarens*; they " lament therefore exceedingly the Loſs of " it, as the greateſt Miſchief that could " poſſibly have befallen the *Chriſtian Church*, " wiſhing it were now extant, as it was " beyond all Doubt, the moſt antient Act " of the *Chriſtian Religion*, and conſequent- " ly ſhould be the only Means, if we had " it, by which we might Correct our pre- " ſent *Greek Verſion*, which (they think) at " the beſt is but a bad One; the Tranſla-

" tor

" tor (whoever he was) having aſſum'd " ſtrange Liberties, in Epitomizing it, and " giving us rather the Senſe than the " Words."— So Unfaithfully has it been Tranſmitted to us.—For the Sake of thoſe who may be curious to know the Great [1] Names, of one or other Perſuaſion, I have inſerted them in the Margin, as collected out of Father *Simon*, *Sixtus Senenſis*, *Grabe*, and other Learned *Authors*.

To ſay no more on this Head, if the *Goſpel* we now have according to *Mathew*, was wrote Originally in *Greek*, as ſo many learned Men contend, let us conſider once again freely and impartially, what muſt be the Conſequence, and upon what a very uncertain Foundation it manifeſtly ſtands.

Not only it is Agreed, the *Original Greek* was never ſo much as heard of, referr'd to, or mentioned, by any one Chriſtian Writer, as then Exiſting any where; but the immediate *Hebrew Tranſlation* alſo of that *Greek* hath been miſſing, ever ſince St. *Jerome*'s time, or very ſoon after, (that is) above 1300 Years paſt; So that now what the *Engliſh Church* makes uſe of, and builds her Faith upon, and which is called particularly in the Front of our Teſtaments; *A Tranſlation out of the Original*

[1] *Epiphanius*, *Jerome*, *Bede*, *Baronius*, Father *Simon*, *Sixtus Senenſis*, Dr. *Grabe*, *Toland*, *Nye*, *Le Clerc*, *Fabritius*, Mr. *Richardſon*, Dr. *Mill*, *Du Pin*, &c.— See alſo A. B. *Wake*'s Preliminary Diſcourſe to his Tranſlation of the Apoſtolical Fathers, Chap. 10. Sect. 4.

Greek,

Greek, is in Truth no other, than what is generally reputed by our preſent learned *Clergy*, —— *A very faulty Tranſlation, from a* [1] *modern Greek Edition, of a bad Greek Tranſlation, out of the loſt Hebrew Tranſlation, from a Greek Original that was never ſeen.*--- Not to mention that the Author of Our ſaid *Greek Tranſlation* (bad as it is) was never known, to any one of the *Fathers*, no not to the inquiſitive *Jerome* himſelf; which therefore put him upon Tranſlating the *Nazaren Goſpel* (in his Time extant) into *Greek* and *Latin*. —— But which Tranſlations together with their Original were never more heard of.

From what has been offer'd therefore upon the Two laſt Poſitions, or Heads, it may be obſerv'd.——That the *Heretics* the Impugners of our preſent *Goſpel of Mathew*, proceed upon other Conſiderations, than the *Letter-writer* ſeems willing to apprehend; They argue, that either it was not deriv'd from St. *Mathew*'s Genuine *Hebrew*, and conſequently is an *Apocryphal Goſpel*, or if it be, that it was *Interpolated* from the Beginning according to *Church-Tradition*, or laſt of all it hath been *Retrench'd*, as ſay others, and Epitomis'd by the *Tranſlator*; and this long before it came into the Hands

[1] *Robert Stephens*, Printer at *Paris*, who Publiſh'd New Editions of the *Greek Teſtament*, *Annis* 1550, 1551. which our laſt Tranſlators of the *New Teſtament* chiefly follow'd.

of

of any of thoſe *Gentile Fathers*, from whom he takes his Accounts of it.

They eaſily ſubmit to the *Letter-writer*'s fine Reaſoning, [1] *That after Chriſtianity was carry'd into almoſt all parts of the* Roman *Empire, and Copies of the* New Teſtament *ſpread with it, and not only remain'd in the Hands of numbers of private Chriſtians, but were publickly received and read in Religious Aſſemblies*; ----which (by the way) could not be, till towards the End of the Fourth Century: That then indeed, it had been in vain, for a private Chriſtian, to have attempted any conſiderable Alteration in his Copy, without being found out, and exploded by others, (tho' ſome Alterations we know were made, found out, and exploded, and yet Continu'd) But, I ſay, the Adverſary is not averſe to admit the Argument on this Head; What he urges with reſpect to Our preſent *Goſpel* is, that ſuppoſing it truly deriv'd from St. *Mathew*'s *Hebrew*, (which the Learned we ſee very much ſuſpect,) yet was it grievouſly *Adulterated* in its very *Original*, or elſe Abridg'd by its Tranſlator whilſt in private Hands. In either of which Caſes, the few Arguments which the *Paſtoral Letter-writer* hath brought, *for the faithful Tranſmiſſion of this particular Goſpel* (among others) will be found of no Force.

As to the *Various Readings*, in a *Goſpel*, the whole of which is ſuſpected to be *Apo-*

[1] Paſtoral Letter, *p.* 64.

cryphal,

cryphal, I do not find the Adverſary triumphs much in that reſpect; tho' it has been obſerved by ſome *Critics*, that in this *Goſpel* alone, which conſiſts of about 1100 *Verſes*, there are to be found no leſs than 1000 *Various Readings*. Which to ſpeak the Truth, with [1] Dr. *Whitby*, are enough to make the Mind doubtful, and a little Apprehenſive, that nothing certain can be expected from a Book, where there are Alterations in every Verſe, and almoſt in every Part of every Verſe.

Therefore upon the whole I am afraid, Thoſe who oppoſe the *Canonical Autority* of this particular *Goſpel*, will be apt to inſiſt, That as the Authors of all profane Writers, of any Note, are, and have ever been, univerſally aſſented to, without Diſpute, which is far from being the Caſe of the Author here examin'd: So neither are there [2] *any ſuch plain and ſtrong Teſtimonies for the unfaithful Tranſmiſſion of* any of thoſe *Writings*, as there are of this *Goſpel*; and conſequently, upon theſe two Accounts, that they may fairly Reject the latter as *Apocryphal*, without [3] *Involving themſelves in the Abſurdity of Rejecting all Antient Writings whatſoever*. For beſides (I ſay) that they think their Authors certain, we have no ſuch plain Evidence for their *Adulteration*; as neither was it ever the In-

[1] Exam. Var. Lect. Mill. *p.* 3.
[2] Paſt. Let. *p.* 63. [3] Ibidem.

tereſt of any Set of Men ſo egregiouſly to *Corrupt them* in Support of Private Opinions. ——That which makes the immenſe Difference between the *Sacred*, and *Profane* Writings, and cauſes a reſtleſs Bickering with, and Scrutiny into, the former is this,—That tho' we are told our Salvation depends, upon their moſt exact Truth and Certainty, yet the *Prieſts* will not permit *Honeſt Men*, to make uſe of their Underſtandings, with the ſame [1] *Freedom*, when they read *theſe*, as they take upon themſelves always to do, when they read a *Profane Author*, tho' there is ſo much the greater Reaſon for it; the *Clergy*, for Inſtance, of the *Church of England* (the moſt Learned in the World) tho' they know the *Sacred Scriptures have doubtful Books in them, and have been moreover horridly* [1] *Abus'd with reſpect even to ſome Eſſentials*; and tho' they allow, there are above 30,000 *Various Readings* in them, many of them of Importance, yet with their good Will, they would tye Men down ſtill, to an implicit Belief of every Book, and every Period, or Paſſage, in thoſe Books, without Examination; though what they

[1] Vid. Paſt. Let. *p.* 6, 7. Where the Author reproaches thoſe who pretend to this juſt and neceſſary Freedom, without which all Reading is Vain.

[2] 'Tis a Thing notorious to Divines, and Dr. *Mill* hath made it manifeſt to the World, That no one Book hath ſuffer'd ſo much, by the Length of Time, nor been ſo perfidiouſly dealt with (by the pretended Guardians of it) as the *New Teſtament* in general. *Vid. Wetſtenii Pref. Nov. Teſt.* --- who collects out of Dr. *Mill* above 30,000 various Readings.

many

many times rigidly inſiſt on, [1] *Tends neither to the Honour of God, nor the Good of Men*; and tho' it evidently Diſagrees with *the Light of Nature, and the Reaſon of Things*; to be govern'd by which, is by the *Letter-writer* [2], deem'd an *Infidel Principle.*

'Tis worth while the obſerving, how artfully, this declared Enemy to rational Liberty applies himſelf there, to the Prejudices of *Vulgar Believers*, ſtirring up their Reſentments againſt thoſe who pretend to judge for themſelves in the Conſtruction of Holy Writ, and inſinuating as if it ſhould be great Piety in Men always to diſtruſt their own Underſtandings, but preſumptuous Wickedneſs in them, ever to doubt of their Wit or Fidelity, thro' whoſe Hands the *Sacred Volumes* have been tranſmitted, and who pretend now authoritatively to dictate their true Meaning to them; inſulting alſo poor *Sceptics* on that Account, and for daring to ſuſpect, they may ſometimes hit upon falſe *Readings*, and poſſibly be impos'd on, in Point of *Divine Revelation*, which he will by no Means ſuffer, tho' thoſe *Readings* ſhould contradict (as is ſaid) *Natural Light*, and the *Reaſon of Things*; and this at the ſame Time too, (which is the Jeſt of it) that he [3] *intreats them* carefully *to peruſe the Sacred Writings.*

Laſtly, *I come to conſider, the Internal Teſtimony this Goſpel according to* Mathew

[1] Paſtoral Letter, *p.* 6. [2] Ibid. *p.* 7. [3] Ibid. *p.* 90.

 affords,

affords, of its Divine Autority, or rather the Defect which Heretics, *the Renouncers of this Goſpel complain of in that Reſpect.*

Now the firſt and great Defect with theſe is, that there is no Manner of Account, no *Teſtimony* to be found in it, of the *Author* himſelf, who he was, in what Time, to whom, or upon what Motives, or Information he began to write, which (ſays the Adverſary) looks very ſuſpicious, eſpecially as he treats of Things ſacred, and is for introducing *a New Faith, a New Worſhip*, and, in a Word, a *New Religion* into the World, *the Impoſtures* in which were very numerous.

This Author (ſays the Adverſary) is ſuppos'd the *firſt* and leading *Evangeliſt*, the *firſt* that undertook to publiſh Facts almoſt incredible, or at leaſt ſuch, as the Heart of Man could not eaſily conceive, even *the Incarnation and Miraculous Birth of a God*, together with his *Divine Life, Doctrines, and Actions*, during his Abode here upon Earth; and laſt of all his cruel Death, and Paſſion, with the dazling Wonders that enſu'd, and which accompany'd his triumphant Reſurrection from the Dead, ſufficient to amaze, and confound Mankind; conſcious therefore of the great Difficulty he ſhould have, to obtain the neceſſary Credit, it was the more incumbent on him, to prepare his Reader's Way to it, by all the juſt Means he could deviſe; as particularly by making

him-

himſelf known firſt, and after that the *Time and Occaſion* of his Writing, as alſo how he became ſufficiently appriz'd of thoſe extraordinary Facts, which he took upon himſelf, *firſt* of all, to publiſh to a bigotted ignorant World, from which he had no Reaſon to expect a very favourable Hearing.——And if he knew himſelf to be indeed *Inſpir'd* for the Undertaking, what ſhould hinder (ſays the Adverſary) or what could poſſibly be the Reaſon, why he did not ſatisfy us in that Point? and this the rather as the Publication of his *Goſpel-Hiſtory* and Precepts, ſhould tend directly to ſubvert, not only *That* of his own Country, but all the *Religious Inſtitutions* then in the World, long eſtabliſh'd, and to which he muſt know, the ſeveral Nations were immoderately addicted.--And further alſo he could not but foreſee, the firm Adherence to all he ſaid, would be indiſpenſibly requir'd, even againſt inveterate Cuſtom of all thoſe, to whoſe Hands his *Hiſtory* ſhould at any Time thereafter come, under Pain of *Eternal Reprobation.*

On the other Hand (ſay they) for us careleſly to ſuppoſe a Literal-Inſpiration, without any Marks of it, or ſo much as the Author's own Teſtimony, or Pretence to it, is a Credulity of which we ought to be aſham'd.——'Tis taking up with a *Religion* founded upon *Tradition*, or *Church Teſtimony*, for which one Part of the Chriſtian World is very deſervedly ex-

expos'd; a mere groundleſs Tradition (ſay they) againſt the Reaſon of the Thing it ſelf, and which therefore is much more eaſily rejected than receiv'd: —— This, (continue they) is to *Believe*, or rather *Create* a Miracle to Our ſelves, merely upon the Strength of our own Fancies.

But there are ſome Men (ſay they) who not only preſume abſurdly, to extend and limit the Word of God, to juſt ſuch a Number of Books, but, as obſerv'd, would alſo bind Men down, to an Implicit Belief, in every Line, and every Word, in thoſe Books; when 'tis ſo Apparent, the *Authors* themſelves Dictate nothing by Dint of their own *Autority*, nor ſeem to expect any ſuch blind Submiſſion at our Hands.

For Inſtance, can any One (ſay they) believe our preſent *Author* had any ſuch Expectation, when he never once offers at ſatisfying his Reader, in any the neceſſary Points leading to it? Where (ſays the Adverſary) does *Mathew* pretend to be ſo much as an Eye or Ear-Witneſs, to any One of Our Saviour's Tranſactions? † Or does he let us know, from whom elſe he learn'd them, or from what Memoirs he came by them, ſo as to be enabled to Tranſmit them to Poſterity, with that Accuracy, a Rational Faith in all his Relations, abſolutely requir'd? If he has fail'd in affording Us theſe neceſſary Antecedents to Belief, we ſee not why it ſhould be demanded of Us.

† Mathew were and followed him. The
he must of course have been a Witness
to some Transactions

The *Inſpir'd Pen-Men* in the *Old Teſtament*, *Moſes* and the *Prophets*, who were not only bare Recorders, but who were themſelves alſo the Workers of Miracles, to which *Mathew* no where pretends; Theſe (ſays the Adverſary) were nevertheleſs careful to let us know, they were commiſſion'd from Heaven, to teach all that they taught us; and ſometimes they inform us too of their own Tribes and Families, for more Satisfaction; but they never fail to aſſure Poſterity, that they Propheſy'd by *Divine Autority*, which you hear of, at every Turn; but which they had not Inculcated ſo often, had they not perceiv'd it neceſſary, to obtain due Credit and Obedience, to the Divine Commands.—— And St. *Paul* alſo in his ſeveral Epiſtles, to thoſe Churches he himſelf erected, follows their Example in ſome meaſure, or ſhall we rather ſay, —— His own Diſcretion.

Whereas the *Author* of this *Goſpel*, is intirely Silent in that matter, and who indeed if he had attempted to gain a Belief of this Sort, his own Irregularities, (ſay his Antagoniſts) would have betray'd him.— Urging that the *Holy Spirit* could never be the Author of thoſe [1] *Contradictions*, Diſlocations

[1] The Adverſary had better omitted [Contradictions, and Diſagreements] ſince Theſe, (moſt Commentators agree,) are ſpecial Signs, and even Proofs of the Truth of the *Goſpel* Hiſtory. —— *Veritatis maximum iſtud eſt Judicium* (ſays *Chryſoſtome.*) *Nam ſi per Omnia Conſentirent, exactâ diligentiâ*

locations, Improprieties, and Diſagreements, which Divines the moſt Learned and pious, have Pointed out, in their Comments on this *Goſpel*.

'Tis true there are ſome, who pretend to account for, the Diſorder and Confuſion obſerv'd, more eſpecially in the former Part of St. *Mathew*'s *Goſpel*, but They are driven to a very odd Expedient ; [1] *They ſuppoſe the Inſpir'd Author wrote at firſt ſeparately, and upon ſeveral diſtinct Papers, which Papers, (or whatever elſe the* Goſpel *was written upon) being careleſly flung aſide by the ſame Author, were afterwards put together, in their preſent confus'd Order, by thoſe, who did not perfectly know, the True Series of the Hiſtory.* —— A Conjecture unworthy the *Holy Apoſtle*, and that *Spirit*, by whoſe *Afflatus* he is ſuppoſed to write.— The *Holy Ghoſt*, (ſay theſe Harmoniſts) dictated the *Goſpel* in good Order, but fail'd in the After-Compoſure, than which nothing can be more improvidential and abſurd.

But 'tis not the Tranſpoſitions and Diſlocations of Facts only, which the Adverſary lays ſo great Streſs on. —— The Meanneſs and Inaccuracy, (ſay they) of the

tiâ, — *Nemo Hoſtium* Chriſti *fuiſſet, quin crederet, conveniſſe unâ* Evangeliſtas, *& Humanâ quadam Conſpiratione, ſcripſiſſe quæ ſcripſerunt*,——. Chryſoſtom. *Hom. in* Math. 1. —— *Apud* Caſaubon. *adv.* Baron. Annal. *p.* 172. —— *Vid. etiam* Grot. *de Veritat.* Chriſtian. Rel. *lib.* 3. *S.* 13. —— *Et ubique inter* Commentator.

[1] *Vid. Whiſt.* Harm. *p.* 103, 104. And other Harmonies to the like Effect.

whole

whole Compoſure: And the partial imperfect Account the Author gives, without Order or Coherence, of that Illuſtrious Perſon, who is his only Subject, as they ſhew him to be much *Inferior in Genius* and Capacity, to the unaſſiſted *Grecian and Roman Hiſtorians* of thoſe Times, ſo therefore (they imagine him) far *unequal* to a *Task*, which ſhould prove of that near Conſequence and Importance to the World.

For I confeſs 'tis not eaſy for ſome Men, to give into that Notion of [1] St. *Paul*, that a Being of Infinite Wiſdom, *ſhould chooſe the Fooliſh and the Weak, the Baſe and Deſpis'd*, (that is) thoſe who are fartheſt off his own Image,) even the Idiotical, Brutiſh part of Mankind, to teach and reform the Wiſe; or that he ſhould delight in ſuch rude Inſtruments, merely to ſhew his Power againſt, and *Confound thoſe*, who with commendable Labour and Study, have adorn'd themſelves with uſeful Knowledge: —— Had this been True of St. *Paul* himſelf, he could never have brought over ſo many People and Nations, to the Profeſſion of Chriſtianity, more 'tis believ'd than all the reſt of the (illiterate) *Apoſtles* together, nor made that illuſtrious Figure in its behalf, before the learned *Pagans*, as we are told he did, as well in *Judæa*, as at *Rome*, and *Athens*.

[1] 1 Cor. i. 27, 28.

The internal Characters therefore, by which other antient Books are many times eſtabliſh'd, are we ſee made uſe of by the Enemies of this, in order to overthrow it: — Their Arguments for which, are left to the *Letter-writer*'s ſerious Conſideration.

But neither do *Sceptics* ſtop here; they ſay further, that the *Author* of this *Goſpel* is really Miſtaken as to Fact, in ſome of his Relations; for they Object, he hath given us [1] *a Genealogy of* Jeſus, which even the Orthodox allow, to be utterly irreconcileable to other Parts of *Holy Writ*, the Conſequence of which is, that he hath adminiſtred Occaſion for a *Hereſy*, which from the firſt Appearance of this *Goſpel*, hath continually infeſted and turmoil'd the *Church*; for (ſay [2] *Church-Writers*,) 'tis from the *Spurious Genealogy*, given in this *Goſpel*, That thoſe two famous *Arch-Heretics*, *Cerinthus*, and *Carpocras*, with their numerous Followers, took upon them to prove, that *Jeſus* was ſprung in the ordinary way, from *Joſeph* and *Mary*, and therewithal to deny his *Divinity* and *Incarnation*, points of the greateſt Concernment to *Chriſtianity*: And which if given up to thoſe *Heretics*, would render the Profeſſion of it, in all other Reſpects, as moſt think, of no Effect to the World.

[1] He that would ſee more of this Genealogy, let him conſult *Sixtus Senenſ. Bibl. Sacr.* p. 582. —— 590. And *Spanheim, Dubia Evangelica.* Vol. 1. 2.

[2] *Simon. Crit. Hiſt. N. T.* Part. 1. chap. 7, 8.

In

In this famous Inſtance of making *Jeſus* to deſcend from *Joſeph the Carpenter*, as *Mathew* apparently contradicts St. *Luke*; ſo his Enemies have obſerved, that this is not the only One, wherein they differ on this Head.— Whoever will be at the Pains to compare *Mathew*'s *Genealogy*, with that tranſmitted to us from St. *Luke*, and *Mathew*'s again, with the *Hebrew Pedigrees*, in the *Old Teſtament*, will find *Gradatim*, as he proceeds, that he ſcarcely agrees with St. *Luke*, or the *Sacred Canon* of the *Old Teſtament*, in a ſingle Degree of Deſcent, except thoſe of the *Patriarchs*, notorious to all; which makes ſome vehemently ſuſpect, either that this *Goſpel* was not wrote, till after the *Deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, when the public Records of the *Jewiſh Pedigrees* (to which the Author before that Time, might have had free acceſs) periſh'd together with the *Temple*; or elſe that it was compos'd by ſome *Gentile-Convert*, who being a Stranger to the *Language*, *Religion*, *and Policy of the Jews*, i. e. ſimple and illiterate; received all Things upon *Truſt*, from ſome unfaithful Relator.

And which (ſays the Enemy) ſeems to be the Caſe more plainly, when we conſider further, this Author's groſs Miſapplication of certain *Prophecies* in the *Old Teſtament*, which by [1] *erroneous* Citations, and a moſt

 wretched

[1] St *Jerome*, Commenting on *Micah* v. 2. and Obſerving the Variance, between the Genuine Text, and its Quotation

wretched and forc'd *Conſtruction*, he hath warp'd to a Senſe, altogether foreign to the *Prophets* true Meaning, and this only for the ſake of accommodating them to *Jeſus* in Proof of his being the *Meſſiah*, which ſtood in need of no ſuch ſupport; and which therefore is thought by ſome, another Inſtance of this Author's want of *Judgment* at leaſt, if not *Fidelity:* As alſo, that as he was not himſelf a *Jew*, ſo neither could his *Goſpel* be calculated, for the Uſe of the *Jews*, who were never wont to apply any of the *Prophecies* quoted in this *Goſpel* to their expected *Meſſiah*, and conſequently he muſt know, could not be eaſily impos'd on, in that reſpect.

Tho' others again have infer'd, from the *Sophiſticated manner* of this Author's quoting, and accommodating *Scriptures*, that he was too well vers'd in *Myſtical Theology*, and made more uſe of it, than well comported with a *poor illiterate Chriſtian* of the *Apoſtolick Age*; and conſequently that this *Goſpel*, might poſſibly be compos'd, by ſome *Heleniſtical Convert Jew*, ſkilful in that way, but at ſooneſt after the Deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*; for the *Primitive Chriſtians* had not learn'd to allegorize and play the

tation in *Math.* ii. 6. Owns freely, that the *Evangeliſt's* Quotations out of the *Old Teſtament* are, almoſt all of them Erroneous. —— *Aut Ordo mutetur, aut Verba, & interdum Senſus quoque ipſe Diverſus ſit,* ——— They neglecting (as he thinks) to Tranſcribe them out of the Books themſelves, and Truſting to their own Memories, which fail'd them.

Fool

Fool with the *Sacred Writings*, till after the *Platoniſts* came into the Church; when ('tis true) they became ſo expert in it, that they would readily convert the plaineſt Text of Scripture to an *Anagogical Meaning*.——But which Method of expounding *Scripture*, to which the *Antients* were continually addicted, gave the *Enemies* of our Holy Religion a Handle to expoſe exceedingly, and ridicule it, as a Religion founded on Tropes and Figures only, and the mere Dreams and Viſions of Impoſtors.

I ſhould conclude here, but that I am called upon, by a very ingenious Author, now lying before me, to give a Specimen or two more of *Mathew*'s ſingular Probity and Skill, in compoſing *Sacred Hiſtory*; but which however I ſhould not have mentioned, did they not in the Opinion of Friends, as well as Foes, require an *Anſwer* more ſolemn and *à propos*, than any has been yet given them.

I have touch'd already upon the *Genealogy* in his firſt Chapter, and have ſhewn how infinitely he varies in his Account there compar'd with St. *Luke*, and the reſt of *Scripture*, of which *Anti-ſcripturaliſts* take Advantage.——I proceed now no farther than his very next Chapter, to demonſtrate equal Judgment and Veracity, in his recording Facts of another Nature.

In

In the Beginning of this ſecond Chapter, [1] He ſets out with a moſt ſurprizing Story, of *three Wiſe Men coming ſome where from the Eaſt, led by a Star, to a certain Houſe.* —Now what Foundation is there in Nature (ſays my Author) for ſuch Aſtrological Notions, as theſe Wiſe Men were acted by; or of ſuch a *Phænomenon* in the Heavens, waiting upon theſe three Men here and there, and laſt of all pointing down to a little Houſe, whither they were, without other Inſtruction, to go? — *Mathew* goes on and ſays, *That at the News theſe ſame Men brought of the* Meſſiah's *being born, all* Jeruſalem *was troubled*; which 'tis urg'd cannot be true, for that we all know, the *Jews* expected their *Meſſiah*, with the utmoſt Deſire and Impatience, agreeably to what St. *Luke* ſays, [2] *That the Tidings of Chriſt's Birth was Matter of great Joy.*—Again, *Verſe* 6th, *Mathew* introduces the *Chief Prieſts* and *Elders*, as applying the Prophecy of *Micah* v. 2. to the *Meſſiah*, which we know the old *Jews* conſtantly underſtood, ſome of King *Hezekiah*, and others of *Zorobabel*, whom they alſo deem'd to have fulfill'd it; and further did in *Chriſt*'s own Time, make

[1] Vid. Scheme of Literal Prophecy, ſuppoſed to be wrote by Mr. *Collins*.—What is obſerv'd by him of *Mathew*'s Inaccuracy and Miſtakes in this Chapter, is no more than what was antiently objected on the Part of the *Manichees*, to be found in St. *Auguſtin*, *Sixtus Senenſis*, &c.

[2] Chap. ii. v. 10.

it

it a part of his Character.——[1] *Not to know whence he was.*——So far my Author concerning *Mathew*'s Judgment and Integrity as an Hiſtorian.

The next Inſtance, he gives, is of his Skill in Chronology, in laying down as he does, the whole Tranſaction of this Affair in the Reign of King *Herod.*——When according to St. *Luke*, *Jeſus* was not born, till many Years after *Herod*'s Death, even when *Cyrenius* being Governor of *Syria*, had laid a Tax on *Judæa*; which 'tis certain, he could not have done, had *Herod*, who was ſupreme Lord of that Country, been alive. Beſides that *Mathew* contradicts the *Vulgar Æra* of *Chriſt*'s *Nativity*, which does not commence, till three Years after the Death of *Herod.*

Nor can this Affair of the Wiſe Men, the Slaughter of the Infants, the Journey of *Chriſt* into *Egypt*, and his Return thence (a [2] Train of Notorieties recorded by *Mathew*) be well reconciled, to the total Silence of St. *Luke*, in relation to them all; Laſtly, that horrible Fact of *Herod*'s ordering all the *Infants*, of a whole Town and Neighbourhood to be ſlain, is ſubject to great Difficulty; for how could ſo extraordinary a Fact happen in the World, and no Hiſtorian, Sacred or Profane, come to the Knowledge of it, ſave this Author only?

[1] *John* ix. 29. [2] Chap. ii.

But

But to let alone other Obſervations of this Nature, That which hath occaſioned the moſt laſting Diſputes, among the Antients, and created the greateſt Suſpicion, in ſober-minded and judicious Men, of the Genuineſs of this *Second*, as alſo of the *firſt Chapter of St.* Mathew's *Goſpel*, is this; That neither of them were to be found, either in the *Nazaren*, or *Ebionite Goſpel*, which was undoubtedly the *Antient Hebrew of the Holy Apoſtle*, nor, which is more ſurprizing, in any one of the Old MS. Copies of *the Goſpel According to* Mark, which by moſt Divines antient and modern, is conceived to be but an *Epitome of* Mathew's.

Now tho' thoſe two Sects, the *Nazarens* and *Ebionites*, conſider'd as *Heretics*, may be ſuſpected to have wickedly retrench'd their *Copies*; yet who will dare to conceive the ſame of St. *Mark*, whoſe Abridgment hath been all along held Sacred? Will any one preſume to ſay, he hath ſacrilegiouſly diminiſh'd two entire Chapters of his Original Author? I ſhould be glad to ſee a fair Solution of theſe Difficulties, often preſs'd by *Heretics*; eſpecially as the *Letter-writer* knows, they have driven many of the pious *Laiety*, and ſome alſo of the learned *Clergy*, to the Neceſſity, either of renouncing the whole *Goſpel* as inſpir'd, or elſe of giving up theſe *two firſt Chapters* as Interpolations; without which they think it cannot be defended. Tho'

Tho' others of the *Clergy* have been perſuaded, the *Apoſtles* were not ſo perpetually inſpir'd, as to be without all Error and Miſtake. —— Therefore *Epiſcopius* (one of the ableſt Divines of the laſt Age) reflecting on ſome *indefenſible Errors* in the *New Teſtament*, and admitting them nevertheleſs to be genuine, obſerves againſt thoſe, who out of a ridiculous Piety, labour'd in vain to account for them [1]: ——*That 'twas much better, and would cauſe leſs Scandal, to acknowledge fairly, ſome Failings in the Canonical Books, rather than fly to abſurd Interpretations, by which the Suſpicion of a Failing, is not only not remov'd, but increas'd; and when the Fault is not acknowledged, it looks* (ſays he) *as if we were not in good Earneſt for Truth.*——*Neither do I think it neceſſary* (ſays [2] *Eraſmus) we ſhould attribute every Thing in the Apoſtles to Miracle. They were Men, ſome Things they were ignorant of, and in others miſtaken.*— [3] *Unus Chriſtus caruit omni Errore, & quì ſcis an hanc Laudem, omnibus modis abſolutam, ſibi ſervari voluit?*——To the like Effect *Grotius, Jerome*, and alſo *Origen*, and ſeveral of the *Greek* Fathers.

But I have been led inſenſibly to a much greater Length, in producing the Arguments of *Heretics*, for the *Letter-writer*'s

[1] Inſtitut. Theol. lib. 4. *p.* 232.
[2] Comment. *Acts* x.
[3] Idem in Epiſt. ad Eckium.

Obſervation, againſt *another Edition* of his laſt *Paſtoral Letter*, than I at firſt propos'd. I had Thoughts indeed, when I firſt begun, to have gone thro' the whole firſt *Goſpel*, and have cited *Verbatim*, not only the Interpolations, but all pretended Inconſiſtencies taken notice of, either by *Heretics*, or our own *Commentators*, and by them collated with the Reſt of *Scripture*. But as ſuch *Citations* I found were like to ſwell to a great Bulk; ſo I apprehend more than enough has been ſaid, to *Anſwer the main Deſign of this Treatiſe*; which is to Evince the Neceſſity of another Sort of Defence, for the *Truth and Autority of* Goſpel *Hiſtory* againſt *Infidels*, than is made in the laſt *Paſtoral Letter*.—The Writer whereof may know, That Men are not to be led now, as in times of Ignorance, by the looſe Traditions of the *Fathers*; who as they were void for the moſt part, of all *critical Knowledge*, ſo were they alſo *Heretics and Enemies to the Catholic Church*;— There is not a ſingle Father, quoted by the *Letter-writer*, but whom he knows to have been *Heterodox in Opinion, and an Infidel*, with regard to the Eſſentials of our preſent Chriſtianity. Now what can their *Teſtimony* avail, either to confirm the *Orthodox Believer*, or to convince other Species of *Heretics* of the *Autority* of the *Goſpel* here treated of? While theſe pretend to ſhew, even from thoſe *Fathers* themſelves, ſo many Improprieties

prieties and Miſtakes confeſs'd in it; beſides frequent Claſhings with the other *Inſpir'd Writings*; and tho' perhaps it will be allow'd to agree with them ſometimes in the Main, yet (ſay they) the Diſagreement that is, demonſtrates Error in the Caſe, and that all its Words always, are not to be taken for Oracles.

But I ſay enough has been urg'd on the part of *Heretics* in relation to our Author's Abilities, for compoſing *Sacred Hiſtory*. 'Twould be an endleſs Work to go thro' all the Remarks and Exceptions they make, to the ſeveral parts of this *Goſpel*.--The Learned [1] *Frederic Spanheim* (the Father a very *Orthodox* Divine) hath raiſed near *one Hundred Objections*, or Doubts (he calls them) touching the *Autority* of this *Goſpel*, in the Solution of which, he exhauſts above 900 Pages in two 4to Volumes, with very little ſatisfaction (as appears) either to himſelf or others:—— Could the dubious Gentleman have rais'd in himſelf, but one Doubt more, and purſu'd it cloſe, 'tis likely it had happily abſorb'd, and put an end to all the reſt; but that, alas! never entered into his Head. *Of ſuch infinite Force is Education, and ſo effectually doth it darken the Minds of Men.*

Thus I have finiſh'd my *Inquiry* into the *Autority of the Goſpel According to Mathew*, with the ſtricteſt regard to Truth; and

[1] In his Tract intitled, *Dubia Evangelica*, conſiſting of 3 Vols. in *Quarto*, Printed at *Geneva* 1639.

tho' I have laid ſome Streſs and Emphaſis, on the Arguments of *Heretics*, and may ſeem in the purſuit of Argument to lean on their Side; yet this I declare is for the ſake of Diſpute only, in order if poſſible to extract the Truth, which every Man, more eſpecially in *this glorious Kingdom of Light and Liberty*, hath both the Right and the Means to know; but which however can be no other ways come at, than by rigid Inquiries of this kind. —— Thus *Cotta*, tho' a Prieſt, undertook to argue with *Balbus*, againſt the very *Being and Providence of the Gods*; but feignedly, and purely to ſatisfy his own Mind in ſome points. *Non ex Animo, ſed ſimulatè.* —— [1] *Non tam refellere* (Balbi *Orationem,*) *quam ea quæ minus intellexit, requirere.*

'Tis true —— The Arguments here urg'd, are moſt of them antient, and the pretended Contradictions, Miſtakes, or Inadvertencies (call 'em what you will) ſuch only, as have been long ſince animadverted upon: —— Nevertheleſs, with Grief I ſay it, they have never yet met with, a tolerable Anſwer, or Solution; on the contrary, we ſee ſome of the moſt celebrated Divines, have not only confeſs'd thoſe Contradictions, *&c.* —— but have ventur'd to father 'em, even upon the Wiſdom of the *Holy Ghoſt* himſelf, as permitting them originally to fall, from the *Evangeliſt*'s Pen, in order to clear the *Goſpel-*

[1] Cic. *de Nat. Deor.* 3. 1.

Writers

Writers of all Confederacy and make their *Goſpels* go down the better; —— to avoid which Blaſphemy, and to clear the inſpired Writings of a Charge ſo heavy, is the great Reaſon, of my laying hold of the preſent Occaſion, to ſet forth —— Some few only of the Faults in our firſt *Goſpel*, *Heretics* moſt inſiſt on; to the end the *Paſtoral Letter-writer*, now his Hand's in, may, if he thinks fit, imploy his great Abilities, in their utter Extinction; and have the ſole Merit, of eſtabliſhing the *Firſt Book* of the *New Teſtament*, on a much better Foot, than it hath ever yet ſtood, ſince its original Publication.

He may perhaps be ſenſible of his own Inadvertence in publiſhing a little too haſtily, his laſt Epiſtolary Performance; in which had he been ſufficiently Provident, he ſhould have guarded beforehand, againſt the very Suſpicion of being *Apocryphal*, to which he knew any one Book of the *New-Teſtament*, was more than ordinarily liable, and endeavour'd at leaſt, to remove ſome of thoſe unanſwer'd Objections, on which that Suſpicion yet ſubſiſts.

At his firſt ſetting out, he promiſed to *enter into the Matter fully and diſtinctly, in order to give us a clear View of the Evidences both of the Truth and Autority of the Writings of the New Teſtament:* —— But it was the general Obſervation (long before this *Inquiry* was thought of) that he had fail'd

fail'd egregiouſly in the Undertaking; and that he was ſo far, from having entered into the Matter fully, that he had produc'd neither Evidence nor Argument to the *Points in Queſtion*, nor attended even to his own *Poſitions*. — In a Word, that he had treated the Subject ſo looſely, as to be thought by ſome, not to be in earneſt; which puts me in Mind of what the Reverend Mr. *Baxter* aptly ſays on the like Occaſion.

Few Chriſtians (ſays that pious [1] Man) *have any other than the Popiſh implicit Faith in this Point, nor any better Arguments than the Papiſts, to prove the Scriptures the Word of God; they have receiv'd it by Tradition, and think it impious to doubt of it, and therefore believe it.* — *Tho' we could perſuade People never ſo confidently, that Scripture is the Word of God, and yet give no Reaſon, why they ſhould believe this, rather than any other Book to be that Word, as it would prove in them no right way of Believing, ſo is it in us, no Right way of Teaching.* — *It's ſtrange* (continues he) *to conſider how we all abhor that Piece of Popery, which reſolves our Faith, into that of the Church; and yet that we do, for the Generality of us Profeſſors, content our ſelves with the ſame Kind of Faith:* — *Yea, and many Miniſters, never yet gave their People better Grounds, than to tell them, it is damnable to deny it; but help them not to the neceſſary Antecedents of Faith.* This

[1] Saints Reſt. Part 2. S. 1. 2.

This general Conduct of the *Clergy*, which Mr. *Baxter* deſervedly complains of, is certainly the *Ground-work* of all *Infidelity*; no *Faith* being laſting, but that which is ſolidly founded, upon the *Reaſon and Evidence of Things*; —— and conſequently, that the ſlovenly imprudent Treatment the *Scriptures* have from Time to Time met with, from thoſe, who profeſs to preach, and write in Defence of them, hath not only greatly contributed to that *Infidelity*, but hath wounded their *Autority* more, than all the Efforts of *Heretics* and *Infidels*.

If their People ſay only they Believe, few of our *Prieſts* care upon what Grounds; they demand not a *Rational Faith*, but avoid and condemn it in all their Practice, and thoſe that contend for it; what they for the moſt part reſt upon, for the Conviction of *Sceptics*, is *Church Teſtimony*, or the Tradition and Autority of the *Fathers*: If theſe are deſpis'd, their laſt Shift is, to threaten Damnation, and to ſalute thoſe who but continue to doubt, with the charitable Names of *Libertines* and *Atheiſts*.

But as foul Language ſeldom hath other Effect, than to Irritate and Provoke, ſo the *Letter-writer*, who cannot be wholly excuſed from it, is here call'd upon, to reply to this Treatiſe, mean as it is, for the tender Inſtruction, if he pleaſes, of Unbelievers; (that

(that is) to ſupply the Defects, of his laſt moſt imperfect and ſuperficial Epiſtle, wrote in Defence of the whole Canon of the *New Teſtament*, eſpecially with regard to the ſingle Book here examined, upon the old Objections, of *Heretics* and *Infidels*, which he may know fly abroad and prevail now, more than ever; in which only he will prove himſelf worthy of that *Superintendancy* he claims over a numerous People, and alſo to be inſpir'd, with that Care and Charity, which a Succeſſor of the *Apoſtles* ſhould extend to all Men.

FINIS.